ROSEMARY

JOSEPHINE LAWRENCE

Merry Christmas.

To Rosemary.

From.

Father & Mother.

Dec. 25. 1925.

ROSEMARY

THE [illegible] THEIR FACES TURNED TOWARD [illegible]

"[illegible]"

ROSEMARY

By

Josephine Lawrence

Illustrated by

Thelma Gooch

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Rosemary

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ROSEMARY

CHAPTER I

GOOD NEWS

THE Willis house was very quiet. The comfortable screened porch was deserted, though a sweater in the hammock and a box of gay paper dolls on the floor showed that it had served as a play-space recently. Inside, not a door banged, not a footfall sounded.

The late afternoon June sunshine streamed in through the hall window and made a broad band to the stairway which was in the shadow. The light touched the heads of three girls huddled closely together in the cushioned window-seat and turned the hair of one to gleaming, burnished golden red, another to a fairy web of spun yellow silk and searched out the faint copper tint in the dark locks of the third. The girls sat motionless, their faces turned toward the stairs, as silent as everything else in that silent house.

"Rosemary!" whispered the dark-haired one suddenly, "Rosemary, you don't think—"

The girl with the gold-red hair, who sat between the other two, started nervously. Her violet blue eyes transferred their anxious gaze from the shadowy staircase to her sister's face.

"Oh, no!" she said passionately. "No! Do you hear me, Sarah? That couldn't happen to us. Why do you say such things?"

"I didn't say anything," protested Sarah sullenly. "Did I, Shirley?"

The little girl with the fairy-web of yellow hair did not answer. She started from her seat and ran toward the stairs.

"Hugh's coming!" she cried.

Quick, even steps sounded on the hardwood treads and a young man with dark hair, darker eyes behind eye-glasses and a keen, intelligent face, descended rapidly. He picked up the child and strode across the hall to the window-seat.

"Poor children!" he said compassionately, sitting down beside Rosemary and holding the younger girl in his lap. "Has the time seemed long? I came as quickly as I could."

Rosemary looked at him piteously.

"All right, dear," he said instantly. "Mother is going to get well. Dr. Hurlbut and I have

decided that all she needs is a long rest. I am going to take her to a quiet place in the country day after to-morrow and she is to stay until she is entirely recovered. Why Rosemary!"

The gold-red head was on his shoulder and Rosemary was crying as though her heart would break.

"That's the way she is," said the dark and placid Sarah. "She jumps on me if I say anything and then she cries herself sick thinking things. I would rather," she declared with peculiar distinctness, "have folks talk than think, wouldn't you, Hugh?"

"I'm sorry to say I can't agree with you," replied the young man briefly. "Here, Shirley, I didn't know you were such a heavy-weight—you run off with Sarah and tell Winnie what I have told you about Mother. Quietly now, and no shouting. Rosemary, dear," he put a protecting arm around the weeping girl, "you will feel better now—we have all been under a strain and the worst is over. Here comes Miss Graham with Dr. Hurlbut and I must see him off. Don't run—he'll probably go right out without seeing you."

But the famous specialist stopped squarely in the hall and the pleasant-faced middle-aged

nurse, standing respectfully on the lower step, nodded reassuringly to Rosemary who was frantically mopping her eyes.

"Well, Dr. Willis," said the great man heartily, "I am mighty glad to have been of some little service. I'm sure you will find Pine Crest sanatorium all that it is said to be and the right place for your mother. She mustn't be allowed, of course, to worry about home affairs. There are younger children, I believe?"

"Three girls," said Hugh Willis. "Rosemary—" he summoned her with a glance,— "my sister, Dr. Hurlbut."

Dr. Hurlbut shook hands kindly letting his quizzical gray eyes rest a moment longer on the tear-stained face.

"Ah, we cry because of past sorrow," he said quietly, "and, a little, because of present joy; is it not so?"

Rosemary lifted her head in quick understanding, tossing back her magnificent mane and showing her violet blue eyes still wet with tears. She smiled radiantly and her face was vivid, glowing, almost startling in its beauty.

"I am so happy!" she said clearly, and her girl-voice held a note of pure joyousness. "So

happy that I do not think I can ever be unhappy again!"

The two doctors smiled a little in sympathy.

"Ah, well," said the famous specialist, after a moment's silence, gently, "let us hope so."

He turned toward the door and the younger man went with him to the handsome car drawn up at the curb. Rosemary, with a swift hug for Miss Graham, dashed past her upstairs to her own room, always a haven in time of happiness or stress.

"Mother is going to get well!" whispered the girl, starry-eyed. "All she needs is rest, and then she will be quite well again. Cora Mason's mother died—" the expressive face sobered and, sitting on the edge of her pretty white bed, Rosemary's twelve-year old mind filled with somber thoughts. Presently she slipped noiselessly to her knees and buried her curly head in the comforting cool white pillow.

"Dear God—" she began, but the tide of joy and relief began to beat loudly again in her heart, sending rich waves of color into her hidden face.

"I am so happy," prayed Rosemary tumultuously. "I am so happy! I am so happy!"

Presently she rose and dragged her white shoes from the closet. Sitting in the middle of the floor, she started contentedly cleaning them.

"Rosemary?" sounded a little voice. "Rosemary, you in here?"

Rosemary straightened up so that she could see across the bed which stood between her and the doorway.

"Yes, Shirley darling," she answered. "Did you tell Winnie about mother?"

"Yes," said Shirley scrambling upon the bed. "We told her. What you doing, Sister?"

"Cleaning my white shoes," replied Rosemary, applying whitener vigorously. "I'm going to put them on and wear my white linen dress. Don't you want to dress up to-night, Shirley? Bring me your shoes, if they are dirty, and I'll do them for you."

"All right, I'll get them," decided Shirley, sliding off the bed backward. "Could I put on my blue sash, Rosemary?"

"Not with that dress," said Rosemary firmly. "I'll have to wash your face and hands and neck and then you can wear the cross-bar muslin with the lace yoke."

"Are you up here, Rosemary?" demanded another voice. "What are you doing?"

"Cleaning my shoes," said Rosemary patiently. "Say, Sarah, don't you think it would be nice if we dressed up a little for dinner tonight?"

"Why?" asked Sarah bluntly.

"Oh, because—because, well, we know Mother is going to get well," explained Rosemary. "And everything has been in such a mess this week, the table half set and nobody careing whether they ate or not. I'd like to show Hugh that we can have things done properly."

"What difference does it make?" drawled Sarah lazily. "I hate a lot of fuss, you know I do. Rosemary, do you suppose it hurts worms to use them for fishing bait? Will you ask Jack Welles?"

"I'll ask him the next time I see him, if you will put on your tan linen with the red tie," promised Rosemary. "And do brush your hair back the way Mother likes it, Sarah. She can't bear to see it stringing into your eyes."

"Oh—all right," agreed Sarah. " Don't forget to ask about the worms."

She departed and in her place came Shirley, carrying a pair of diminutive and soiled white shoes.

"I wish," she announced pleasantly, sitting

down on the floor beside Rosemary to watch the cleaning process, "I wish we could have ice-cream."

"Well I'll ask Winnie," said Rosemary promptly. "What dessert do you suppose we are going to have to-night?"

"Berries," Shirley answered wisely. "I saw 'em. Couldn't Winnie make us chocolate ice-cream?"

"Oh, she wouldn't have time to make it," said Rosemary, "but I'll ask her if I can't telephone the drug-store and have them send us some. There your shoes are, honey. Now hurry and get dressed."

Dr. Hugh Willis, coming down from his mother's sick-room at the summons of the musical chime which announced the dinner hour, thought he had never seen a pleasanter sight than greeted his eyes in the dining-room. The room itself was pleasant and airy and the last rays of the sun struck the table set with fresh linen and a simple and orderly array of silver. But it was the three joyous faces turned expectantly toward him that caught and held his attention. Rosemary, in white from head to foot, stood behind her mother's chair and all the light in the room seemed to center in her eyes and hair.

Shirley, looking like a particularly wholesome and adorable cherub from her sunny curls and wide, gray eyes to her fat and dimpled knees scuffled in an impatient circle around her own special seat and Sarah, a stout and stolid little Indian in tan linen and scarlet tie, showed her one beauty—a set of strong, even white teeth—in an engaging smile.

"Well how smart we are," smiled the doctor, surveying them appreciatively. "Seems to me everyone is dressed up to-night."

"We wanted to have things nice—because Mother is going to get well," said Rosemary with simple directness.

For answer Dr. Hugh came forward and pulled out her chair for her, "just as if I were a grown-up woman," she recounted with pride to her mother later, and then lifted Shirley to her seat and tied on her bib dexterously.

"We're going to have ice-cream," Sarah informed him.

"That's fine," he commented a trifle absently, beginning to carve. When he had served them all, he spoke seriously.

"Girls," he said, "I'm going to send a telegram after dinner to-night to Aunt Trudy Wright. Mother wants her to come and stay

with you while she is away; I don't think she can begin to mend until she knows that she has provided for you."

"Oh, Hugh!" Rosemary mashing potato for Shirley's hungry consumption, looked distressed. "I can keep house, I know I can. We don't need Aunt Trudy."

"She won't let me keep any mice in my room," wailed Sarah. "I don't like her, either."

"Let me eat it now," said Shirley, referring to her potato. "Let's tell Aunt Trudy not to come. She says oatmeal is good for me and I don't like oatmeal."

"Have you all finished?" asked the doctor calmly. "Well then, I have something to say: Aunt Trudy is coming, just as soon as I can get her here; if for no other reason than Mother wants her and will go away happy in the belief that you will be well taken care of. There is to be no argument and I absolutely forbid you to mention the subject to Mother; if she says anything to you, try to act as though you were pleased at the prospect. For my part, I should think you would be glad she could come. An aunt is pretty nice to have when you are in trouble."

"You don't know Aunt Trudy," said Sarah pertly.

"Rosemary, will you go up and sit with Mother while Miss Graham has her dinner, when we are through?" asked Dr. Hugh, ignoring Sarah's remark. "I am going down to the drug-store for a few things and I'll be back within half an hour."

The dessert of berries and ice-cream were eaten almost in silence. Three of the people at the table were busy with conflicting thoughts. Shirley alone was concentrating her attention on the delight of a larger slice of cake than usual.

CHAPTER II

THE WILLIS WILL

"IT'S the first real warm night we've had isn't it?" said Mrs. Hollister conversationally. "I got to thinking about you tonight, Winnie, and I said to Mamie that I believed I'd come up and see you for a minute or two; I thought you might be glad to have a little help with the dishes or something."

Winnie, a tall gaunt woman, the gray hair on her temples hardly perceptible because of the ash-blondness of her tightly pulled hair, stood beside the kitchen table apparently figuring some problem on a slip of paper.

"My dishes are done," she said capably, "but sit down, do Mrs. Hollister; I'm not denying that I'm glad to see a friend after the day I've had."

Mrs. Hollister sank heavily into the cushioned rocker drawn up near the table and removed her cotton gloves.

"I said to Mamie I knew you'd be tuckered out," she observed. "Am I keeping you, Win-

nie—is that important?" she indicated the slip of paper in the other's hand.

"I can do it any time before to-morrow morning," Winnie explained. "It's the laundry list and I have about everything counted up. The man comes Wednesdays."

"Where are the girls?" asked the visitor, her quick eyes roving approvingly around the immaculate kitchen. "Did the poor lady get off safely?"

"The girls are in bed," said Winnie, taking the questions in order. "They were worn out and I told 'em bed was the best place for them to be. They've lost all their good sensible habits these last two weeks and it's glad I am the young doctor is going to be here to look after 'em. They need to be settled down if ever anybody did."

"And Mrs. Willis? She will really get well?" urged Mrs. Hollister.

Winnie's face changed. Her eyes softened.

"They all say she will be better than she's been for years, bless her! All of 'em, Dr. Hurlbut, that big specialist that came from New York, and Dr. Jordan and Doctor Hugh, who's as good as any of them if he is young, all of 'em say if she only rests a year in this sanatorium and doesn't have to worry we'll never know she was sick."

"She was taken sudden, wasn't she?" asked the visitor. "Mamie said you found her, Winnie."

Winnie snapped on the light for the summer dusk was deepening into dark.

"That I did," she answered. "I'll never forget it, never. I was going up to her room to ask her whether I should wait for the butter and egg woman or send down to the store and in the upstairs hall I walked right into her, lying so still and white on the floor. I got her on the bed myself and sent Rosemary flying down to Dr. Jordan's office for Dr. Hugh. Dr. Jordan came up with the young doctor and they got the trained nurse and for over a week we didn't know whether the dear lady would stay with us or not. Then she got a little better and Dr. Hugh wanted her to go off to this sanatorium place, but she wouldn't hear of it till the specialist put in his word and all three doctors promised her she'd be cured."

"They say Dr. Hugh is going to take Dr. Jordan's practice," said Mrs. Hollister irrelevantly.

"I don't know who 'they' are, but for once they've told the truth," said Winnie a bit tartly. "Dr. Jordan is going away for two months, or

three, and Dr. Hugh is to look after his office and patients. He may settle down in Eastshore, if he likes it well enough."

Winnie did not add what she, as a confidante of the family, had heard discussed, namely that Dr. Hugh would likely buy the practice of Dr. Jordan who was an old man and anxious to retire from active service.

"Dr. Hurlbut came down in a great big car this afternoon and took Mrs. Willis," Winnie went on, "Dr. Hugh went with her and he's coming back in the morning. The girls behaved beautifully and not one of 'em cried till their mother was well out of sight."

"Well I should say you'll have your hands full with the housekeeping," was Mrs. Hollister's next comment. "I don't suppose you can depend on much help from the girls, though Rosemary is old enough to do considerable if she's a mind to. How old is she now?"

"Twelve," replied Winnie. "But you musn't think I'm to do everything, Mrs. Hollister. Miss Trudy Wright is coming to-morrow, to stay till Mrs. Willis gets home."

"Who's she?" asked Mrs. Hollister bluntly. "Anybody you can rely on?"

"I'm not saying I don't like her, for I do,"

said Winnie with admirable conservatism, "Miss Wright means well, if ever a woman did. She's the half sister of Mrs. Willis's husband and she sets great store, she's always saying, by her dead brother's family."

"You don't sound as if you were so terribly pleased," said Mrs. Hollister shrewdly. "Does she put her nose into things that are no concern of hers?"

"No, I wouldn't say that for her," answered Winnie. "I don't know as there is any one thing I can put my finger on. Of course she has never been in charge of the house before—it will be queer to be taking orders from her. She's been here off and on, making visits and she never bothered me. Mrs. Willis, poor dear, went away feeling sure that the girls would be well looked after and I'd be the last one to think of disturbing her thoughts. But, between you and me, Mrs. Hollister, Miss Wright can't manage a family like this. She just hasn't got it in her."

"You mean the girls are a handful?" suggested Mrs. Hollister. "I thought as soon as you said she was coming, that a woman without any children of her own would find it hard trying to look after three lively girls."

"Children of your own has got nothing to do

with it," asserted Winnie, tossing her head. "I can make any one of the children stand round, if I give my mind to it, and they're as fond of me as can be. But remember I say if I give my mind to it—Miss Wright hasn't got the patience to keep repeating the same thing fifty times and if she gives an order and they don't pay attention she drops it right there. I'm not blaming her—she's fat and has plenty of money and likes to be comfortable; she must be fifty years old, too, and at her time of life it's only fair to expect to have a little peace. But I know the Willis family, and giving in to the girls is the worst thing you can do. I get wore out lots of times and knuckle down, but Dr. Hugh won't. I've been watching him, the little time he's been here, and I'll bet he can hold out against even Rosemary."

"I suppose it's her red hair," said Mrs. Hollister vaguely.

"Rosemary is an angel from heaven," declared Winnie, loyally rising to the defense of the absent. "She's always been the sweetest child the Lord ever made and when she was a baby I could never bear to scold her because she'd look at me so sad-like from those big blue eyes of hers. But Rosemary has the Willis will and the Willis tem-

per and when she is on her high horse the house won't hold her. Sooner or later she's going to try to have her way against the young doctor's orders and then there will be war. All the girls are getting out of hand now, anyway, what with their mother sick and the house upset and no regular plan to follow. I caught Sarah yesterday making her breakfast off of lemonade, raisin pie and fancy cakes."

"She's a queer one, that Sarah," said Mrs. Hollister, chuckling. "She nearly frightened the little Percey girl into fits showing her a live snake one afternoon."

"Sarah's got a good heart, if you can find it," declared Winnie, "but unless you handle her just right, you're in for a peck of trouble. Rosemary's temper blazes up and burns fierce enough dear knows, but it burns itself out good and clean and leaves a good clean ash. Now you take Sarah—she goes into a fit of the sulks and likely as not she won't speak to anyone in the house for a week."

"She would if she was my child," announced Mrs. Hollister grimly. "I'd soon shake that out of her."

"It's my private belief that you can't shake anything out of Sarah, once she makes up her

mind to it," said Winnie solemnly. "She's got the Willis will and that is a caution. Even Shirley, six years old and looking like a cherub straight from above, even Shirley has got a temper of her own and as for will—well you try to make that baby do a thing she says she won't do. The Willis will is something to reckon with, Mrs. Hollister."

"Why do you keep talking about the Willis will?" asked Mrs. Hollister with curiosity.

"Because I've lived with it for twenty-eight years and I know all about it," said Winnie. "Twenty-eight years ago, this spring, have I lived with this family and in that time I've seen Doctor Hugh grow from the baby that was laid in my arms into a fine young man with the Willis will made a help to him instead of a hindrance. Mr. Willis—you never knew him, he died six months after Shirley was born and Mrs. Willis has never been the same woman since—had it, too, and the temper along with it, but he made them both his servants and himself the master, as the Bible says. Many's the time I've heard the story of Governor Willis, (his picture hangs in the hall) and of how he held out against the whole legislature and the public and proved himself right in the end. Old Judge Willis, the

father of Doctor Hugh's father, once came near being lynched for a decision he made, but no howling mob could make him retract. As I tell Mrs. Willis, when she gets to worrying about the strong wills the girls have, it's worse not to have a mind of your own than to have too much; I'm not one to preach breaking anyone's will—bend it the right way, I always say."

"Yes, that sounds all right," admitted Mrs. Hollister who had listened eagerly, "but I don't know as I'd want to have the bending of three wills all at once. It strikes me that the young doctor is going to be pretty busy if he tries to 'tend to 'em all at the same time. And you say he's going to take Dr. Jordan's practice, too."

"He'll be busy, but he can handle anything," declared Winnie confidently. "Dr. Hugh was my baby—I took care of him till he was five years old—and I know he'll manage all right. The girls are delighted to have a big brother, and they'll try to please him, I know they will."

"It's funny to say, but he's almost a stranger to them, isn't he?" said Mrs. Hollister reflectively. "How many years has he been away from Eastshore?"

"Counting from the time he went away to school, about twelve years," answered Winnie.

"He came home vacations, of course, but the last two years he wasn't home at all. He's been studying abroad and Mrs. Willis was so happy to think he'd be home with her this summer. She was pleased as could be that he wanted to settle in Eastshore. She's talked a lot to me, since Mr. Willis died, about what she hoped the children would do and when Dr. Hugh wrote her that he didn't want to be a fashionable city doctor and hoped he could do as much good in a quiet, industrious, uncomplaining way as Doctor Jordan had done during the forty-five years he's lived in Eastshore, why Mrs. Willis just about cried she was so happy."

"Well, we never know what's going to happen, do we?" sighed Mrs. Hollister, beginning to pull on her gloves as she noted that the plain-faced kitchen clock said quarter of nine. "I'm sure I hope she'll get the rest she deserves and come home to find nothing bad has happened."

"Of course she will," Winnie's voice held a faint trace of indignation. "What do you think is going to happen while she is gone? With Doctor Hugh and Miss Trudy Wright, to say nothing of me, around to see to everything, what else do you expect but smooth sailing?"

"Winnie!"

The kitchen door opened a crack and a dark head poked itself in.

"Winnie, do you care if I take a piece of the chocolate cake from the buffet closet?" asked Sarah politely. "I'm hungry."

"Your brother says you eat too much cake—go to bed and you'll fall asleep again and forget that you're hungry,"commanded Winnie.

"Can't I have just one piece?" insisted Sarah.

"You can not," said Winnie firmly.

"Well, I thought you'd say that," announced Sarah calmly, "so I took it first, before I asked you."

"Give it to me this instant," cried Winnie, swooping upon the small girl.

"Oh, I've eaten it," declared Sarah pleasantly. "I thought you'd make a fuss."

Winnie looked at Mrs. Hollister, who was moving toward the door.

"All I have to say," said the visitor majestically, "is Heaven help the young doctor."

CHAPTER III

AUNT TRUDY COMES

"ARE you going to the station, Sarah?" Sarah, stretched in luxurious comfort on the porch rug, raised a rumpled head above her book and frowned.

"Why should I go to the station?" she drawled.

"You know perfectly well," answered Rosemary with some impatience. "Aunt Trudy is coming on the 4:10 and Hugh asked us to meet her."

"You go—you're the oldest," said Sarah calmly. "I want to read about sick rabbits."

"Sarah, you know you promised mother to be good and to do the things you thought would please her. Come on and meet Aunt Trudy—we'll all go, you and I and Shirley," wheedled Rosemary, beginning to roll up her knitting.

"Where's Hugh—why doesn't he go?" asked Sarah who usually exhausted all arguments before giving in.

"Hugh's down at Dr. Jordan's and he won't

be home till dinner time," replied Rosemary. "Mother would want us to be nice to Aunt Trudy, you know she would."

"Well, I'm going to be nice," insisted Sarah, scrambling to her feet and hurling the book under the swing where she kept the larger part of her dilapidated library. "I'll go to the station if I can go as I am—I have to clean the rabbit hutch when I get back and I won't have time to be dressing and undressing all the afternoon."

"You can't go as you are!" Rosemary surveyed her sister appraisingly. "Your face is black and your dress has a grease spot across the front. And you haven't any hair ribbon."

"I'll go as I am, or I won't go at all," repeated Sarah coolly.

Rosemary stabbed her long needles into her half-finished sweater and hung her knitting bag on the back of her chair.

"Then you can stay home," she said crossly. "I'll go up and get Shirley now and we'll go without you."

She ran upstairs, coaxed the protesting Shirley from her play of sailing boats in the bath-tub, and was buttoning her into a clean frock when Sarah came tramping through the hall. She

occupied a room with Shirley, while Rosemary had a room to herself connected with the younger girls' room by a rather narrow door.

"Wait a minute and I'll go," said Sarah, jerking down her tan linen dress from its hook in the closet.

"Is Aunt Trudy's room all ready, Winnie?" asked Rosemary, as the three sisters stopped in the kitchen to notify that faithful individual of their departure. "Do we look nice?"

It was impossible to look at the three faces without an answering smile. Rosemary glowed, pink-cheeked, star-eyed, in a frock of dull blue linen made with wide white piqué collar and cuffs. Her hair waved and rippled and curled, despite its loose braiding, almost to her waist. Rosemary was simply going to the station to meet the 4:10 train, but nothing was ever casual to her; she met each hour expectantly on tip-toe and, as her mother had once observed, laughed and wept her way around the clock. Sarah smiled broadly—going to the station to meet Aunt Trudy had, for some inexplicable reason, resolved itself into a joke for her. Sarah was not excited and she represented solid common-sense from her straight Dutch-cut hair to her square-toed sandals, for no amount of argument from Rosemary

could induce her to put on her best patent leather slippers. And Shirley—well Winnie picked up Shirley and hugged her fervently, which was the emotion Shirley generally inspired in all beholders. She was a young person, all yellow curls and fluffy white skirts and tiny perfect teeth and distracting dimples.

"Miss Wright's room is in perfect order," reported Winnie, setting Shirley down and straightening her pink sash. "I put on the embroidered bureau scarf and the best linen sheets and pillow cases, just as you said, Rosemary."

"And I put a bowl of lilacs on her table this morning," said Rosemary happily, "so I guess everything has been attended to. Do you want us to get anything up town? We're going to the station, Winnie."

"No, my dinner's all planned," answered Winnie with pride. "What train's Miss Wright coming on—the 4:10?"

"Yes, and Hugh said to have Bernard Coyle bring us up to the house with his jitney," said Rosemary. "I suppose Aunt Trudy will have some bags and parcels. You'll be round when we get back, won't you, Winnie? I don't know exactly what to say to her."

"Bless you, child, you'll do all right," Winnie

encouraged her. "Doctor Hugh will be home to dinner and 'tisn't as if your aunt was a total stranger."

"But she really is a total stranger," commented Rosemary, as they began their walk to the station. "Of course she has been here a couple of days last summer and she spent New Year's with us; but Mother entertained her and we only saw her now and then, mostly at the table."

"Well, we have to make the best of it now, because Hugh says we can't upset Mother," said Sarah. "I know she will be an awful lot of trouble and she won't know the first thing about animals."

"Maybe she'll read all the time," offered Shirley in her soft, baby voice. "Dora Ellis has an aunt who reads books all the time and Dora can do just as she pleases. She told me so."

"Well, don't you listen to everything Dora Ellis tells you," said Rosemary severely. "Mother doesn't like you to play with her and Hugh said you were not to go across the street without asking permission; doesn't Dora Ellis live on the other side of the street?"

"Yes, she does, but I didn't go over in her yard, not for weeks and weeks," explained Shir-

ley earnestly. "She told me 'bout her aunt last year, in kindergarten."

"All right, honey, I'm not scolding," declared Rosemary, giving her a kiss. "There's the station clock and it says half-past four. But, pshaw, that clock never keeps time."

It was not half-past four they found, when they consulted the clock in the ticket office, but it was close to ten minutes past and when the three girls stepped out on the platform the smoke of the train was already visible far up the track.

There were several people waiting, most of them Eastshore people, and these came up and asked about Mrs. Willis. Rosemary, assuring them that her mother was definitely declared to be out of danger, was fairly radiant.

"Rosemary!" a girl about her own age hailed her. "I'm so glad to see you. Daddy told us last night your mother is better, but I didn't like to call you up because I thought perhaps you still had the phone muffled. Mother and I are going down to the beach to stay till after Labor Day."

"How lovely!" cried Rosemary. "You have the nicest things happen to you, Harriet. Are you going on this train?"

"Yes, and don't I wish you were coming!" responded Harriet warmly. "Couldn't you come down next month, if your mother is well enough to leave?"

"Oh, goodness, Mother has gone away, to be gone a year," said Rosemary hurriedly. "I can't go anywhere, you see. Besides Aunt Trudy Wright is coming on this train, and Hugh is going to be home all summer. There's your mother beckoning—run, Harriet, and be sure you write to me."

They kissed each other and Harriet ran back to her mother and was lost in the anxious pushing group that surrounded the steps of the slowly stopping train.

"Hang on to Shirley, while I try to find Aunt Trudy," directed Rosemary, with a sudden panicky feeling that she couldn't remember what her aunt looked like.

But, as soon as she saw her, she recognized her.

"Well, Rosemary darling, you came to meet me—that's lovely I'm sure," cried Aunt Trudy, panting slightly from her leap off the last step of the car, to the conductor's unconcealed amazement. "And Mother is much better, the telegram said. As soon as I heard, I resolved nothing

should keep me from you— Oh, there's Shirley and Sarah, the dears!"

Shirley responded affectionately to her aunt's caresses, but Sarah stood like a wooden image and submitted to being kissed with bad grace. Aunt Trudy was too excited to be critical.

"What do I do about my trunks?" she fluttered. "And these bags are both heavy— I've brought you girls each a little something. Is Hugh home? And Winnie is still with you, of course?"

Rosemary wisely did not attempt to answer all these questions and, considering that Winnie had been in the Willis family for twenty-eight years and Aunt Trudy had unfailingly put this question to some member of the family at every meeting for the last twenty-seven, this particular query might be said to be more a comment than a question.

"We'll go up to the house in Bernard Coyle's jitney," said Rosemary, leading the way around to the side platform. "He will take your trunk checks, Aunt Trudy, and the express man will deliver them."

Bernard Coyle ran two of the three Eastshore jitneys and personally conducted the least ancient of his two cars. He welcomed the prospect

of four passengers with a glad smile and swung Aunt Trudy's bags to a safe place under the seat at a nod from Rosemary. While they climbed in, he departed with the trunk checks and returned in a few minutes to report that the three trunks would be in the front hall of the Willis home within an hour.

Then he took the wheel of his wheezy little car and without another word drove frenziedly and rackingly through the quiet streets till the Willis house was reached. Winnie, mindful of Rosemary's plea, came out to the curb to meet them.

"Well, Winnie, I'm glad to see you again," was Miss Wright's greeting. "You and I are to keep house and look after these flighty young folks, I understand."

"Yes'm," nodded Winnie. "Your room's all ready, Miss Wright—the one you always have, next to Mrs. Willis'. And Doctor Hugh said to tell you he'd be home at quarter of six."

Aunt Trudy Wright was a rather short, dumpy woman and inclined to be stout and short of breath. She had iron-gray hair, near-sighted dark eyes and very pretty, very plump small hands. She exclaimed over her room when she saw it, said that everything was lovely and insisted on kissing the three girls again. Sarah

promptly left at this point and was discovered by her brother when he came home, lying flat on the porch rug and absorbed in a book which dealt, in detail, with the health and welfare of rabbits.

"Well you look comfortable," he said good-humoredly. "Aunt Trudy come? Who went to meet her? Where are the other girls?"

"Uh-huh," grunted Sarah, interested at that moment in a description of a balanced diet for her pets.

Dr. Hugh laughed and went on. The house seemed strangely quiet to him, though he could hear Winnie humming in the kitchen and appetizing odors promised a dinner on time. In the upstairs hall, Rosemary tip-toed to meet him, her eyes dark with mystery.

"Hello, where is everyone?" asked her brother, giving her a kiss. "What has happened to Aunt Trudy?"

"She's getting ready for dinner," explained Rosemary. "She's been crying in Mother's room for almost an hour and then her trunks came and she thought she'd change her dress."

"Crying in Mother's room—what for?" demanded Doctor Hugh quickly.

"Oh, because memories were too much for her," quoted Rosemary solemnly. "She made

Shirley and me cry, too, but Sarah went down stairs when she tried to kiss her, so she didn't hear her talk."

"I'll give Sarah credit for good sense," said Doctor Hugh grimly.

He strode down the hall to his mother's room, took the key from the inside and locked the door and dropped the key in his pocket.

"And that's that," he announced, smiling a little at Rosemary's puzzled face.

CHAPTER IV

DR. HUGH TAKES COMMAND

MISS Wright appeared at dinner in rustling black silk, and kissed Dr. Hugh affectionately. In her plump arms she carried three packages.

"I brought each of the girls a box of French chocolates," she explained, smiling. "They're simply delicious and there is just one shop in town which imports them."

Rosemary dimpled as she untied her package, Shirley shrieked with glee and even Sarah's "thank you, Aunt Trudy" had an unusual depth of warmth in it. Two-pound boxes of chocolates did not appear at dinner every day.

Dr. Hugh put down his carving knife as Shirley lifted the lid from her beribboned box.

"I think I'll have to take charge of these boxes," he said quietly. "Aunt Trudy is very generous to remember you so bountifully, but I can not let you make yourselves sick. I'll keep them carefully for you in the office and you may

have a safe number every day I promise you."

"Oh, Hugh!" Rosemary's voice was reproachful.

"I won't be sick," said Shirley with cheerful confidence.

Sarah did not speak, but she thrust her box under the edge of the tablecloth.

"It's perfectly pure candy, Hugh, and won't hurt them," Miss Wright assured him briskly.

"Well, I'm sorry, but I believe that the purest and most expensive candy taken in sufficient amount, will upset the digestion of an ostrich," said Doctor Hugh firmly. "Put the boxes on the serving table till after dinner, Rosemary."

"And I hope you'll keep 'em under lock and key," observed Winnie as she passed the creamed potatoes. "Sarah will be eating chocolates for breakfast if there's none to interfere with her."

Winnie considered herself a member of the family, as indeed she was, and she frequently took part in the table conversation except when there were strange guests present.

Rosemary gathered up the boxes and put them on the side table and dinner proceeded pleasantly enough. Aunt Trudy was a social soul and seldom at a loss for something to say. She sat in the absent mother's place and beamed

upon the little circle, Dr. Hugh across from her, Rosemary at his right, Shirley next to her and on the other side of the round table, Sarah the silent. Sarah was certainly a child of few words and she was never troubled by any idea that something might be expected from her in the way of a contribution to the general talk. To-night she sat stolidly, her dark eyes roving now and then to the candy boxes which were behind Rosemary.

"So you're going to practice right here in Eastshore, Hugh?" Miss Wright was saying as Winnie brought in the salad, "your mother wrote me, before she was ill, that you expected to take Doctor Jordan's office; has he retired?"

"No, not retired exactly," answered Hugh, "but he is planning to take a long and much-needed vacation. He left for Maine this afternoon. We both thought it better for many reasons to make no change in the office—I'll take his just as he left it. Of course I'll have some kind of a place here, too, but not many patients will call here."

Sarah created a diversion by pushing back her plate and slipping down from her chair.

"Where are you going, dear?" her aunt asked

in surprise. "Don't you want any dessert?"

"No, it's cornstarch pudding," said Sarah calmly.

Miss Wright apparently accepted the explanation, but Doctor Hugh spoke sharply.

"Sarah, come back here—dinner isn't over yet."

Sarah stopped and faced him defiantly.

"I don't want any pudding," she declared, scowling. "Winnie knows I don't like it and she always makes it."

"Come back and sit down and wait until you are excused—" Doctor Hugh's level gaze seemed to draw the rebellious Sarah back to her chair. "If you don't care for the pudding you needn't eat it, but don't criticise anything that is placed before you."

His staccato tones seemed to have a tonic effect on Sarah, for she ate the pudding when it came, without further discussion. But the moment her aunt rose from the table, she made a bee-line for the candy boxes.

"It's mine, Aunt Trudy gave it to me," she insisted when her brother interfered.

"Two apiece, of such rich candy, is enough for any one," he declared. "And one for Shirley—

take the kind you want, sweetheart, and then I'll show you where I am going to keep them for you."

"I must say I think you're too fussy, Hugh," commented Aunt Trudy, as Shirley made a lingering selection and Rosemary passed her box to her aunt and Winnie and then chose two of the enormous candies for herself. "All children are fond of candy and I read only the other day that a craving for sweets is the mark of a healthy appetite."

Doctor Hugh made no direct reply.

"Sarah, have you eaten your candy?" he asked pleasantly.

"If I can't have my own box," said Sarah with emphasis, "I won't eat any."

"I'll put them away for you, then," declared her brother equably. "Come and see where they'll be—in the glass cabinet in the office. You may have two apiece after dinner till they are gone. They'll last twice as long that way, Sarah," he added, smiling at her as he turned the key in the cabinet and replaced his key ring in his pocket.

The telephone rang and Winnie answered it. The doctor was wanted and it was eight o'clock before he returned. Aunt Trudy was reading

under the living-room lamp—for the nights were still a little too cool to be comfortable on the porch—Rosemary knitting, and Shirley and Sarah playing dominoes on the floor.

"What time does Shirley go to bed?" the doctor asked, standing in the doorway.

Rosemary looked up, a little troubled.

"Why she always went to bed at half-past seven when Mother was well," she answered, "but since she was sick, Shirley got in the habit of staying up till Sarah goes and sometimes Sarah won't go till I do."

"And what time do you go?" inquired her brother.

Rosemary blushed and began to knit faster.

"I'm supposed to go at nine," she admitted, "but sometimes it is—later. Honestly, Hugh, I don't see why I should go to bed at nine o'clock like a little girl; I'm twelve, you know."

"Half-past eight would be better," said her brother, coming over to sit on the arm of her chair, "but if Mother didn't object, we'll still say nine. You are a little girl, dear, in spite of your great age, you see. What about Sarah?"

"You ask more questions than any one I ever knew," cried the exasperated Sarah with bitter frankness. "I wanted to read my rabbit book,

but Shirley teased and I played dominoes to please her. And now I suppose you'll be saying I ought to go to bed!"

"Rosemary?" said Doctor Hugh.

"Sarah is supposed to go to bed at eight o'clock," announced Rosemary reluctantly. "She used to argue with Mother nearly every night. No one ever wants to go to bed early, Hugh, and lots of the girls stay up till ten."

"Then I'm sorry for lots of girls," rejoined the doctor. "Shirley is going to be my good girl and go to bed every night at half-past seven, aren't you, dear? Sarah at eight and Rosemary at nine—and that's all settled. Put up the dominoes, children, and run along for it's twenty minutes past eight this minute."

"I don't want to go to bed," wailed Shirley.

"I'll go up with you, darling," promised Rosemary, putting down her knitting. "I'll tell you a story about the little brown bear."

"Don't want a story," said Shirley with finality.

Aunt Trudy put down her book and surveyed her youngest niece sympathetically.

"What's the matter with my sweetheart?" she asked, her voice tender. "Is she afraid of the big dark?"

The doctor made an impatient exclamation. "That's nonsense, Aunt Trudy," he said curtly. "No child of my mother has ever been frightened of the dark; we were not brought up that way. Every one of us has been trained to go up to bed alone at the right time, as a matter of course. Sarah, put away those dominoes and go upstairs to bed with Shirley."

Sarah tumbled the game into the box and stalked from the room without a word to any one. Shirley simply threw herself flat on the floor and cried with anger. She was sleepy and tired and she resented this summary curtailment of her privileges. For the last two weeks she had been going to bed when Rosemary did and she liked the plan.

"I hope you will excuse us, Aunt Trudy," said the harassed Doctor Hugh, scooping his small sister up from the floor and carrying her toward the door. "We're in sad need of a little discipline, I'm afraid."

"And you're not going to enforce it," he said grimly to himself as he marched upstairs with the screaming Shirley. "I seem to have my work cut out for me—I wonder how about Rosemary?"

When he came downstairs again, having seen

both Shirley and Sarah quiet and asleep, he found his sister and aunt deep in the problem of "narrowing off."

"I just waited to say good-night to you, Hugh," said Aunt Trudy brightly. "I'm tired from the trip and I want to start the day well to-morrow."

She kissed him and rustled out of the room, and Rosemary folded up her work as the deep chime of the hall clock sounded nine.

"Shirley was tired, Hugh," she said, a little timidly. "She hardly ever acts that way. And Sarah doesn't mean to be obstinate, but she just can't help it."

"Well, I'm glad you think to-night isn't an average performance," declared her brother humorously. "You're a sweet older sister, Rosemary. The girls couldn't do better than to pattern after you."

"Oh, Hugh! You are nice—" Rosemary's voice rose in a crescendo of pure pleasure. "But I'm not a good example—you won't say that when you know me. I get as mad, as mad—as —Shirley."

"The more shame to you," said the doctor unbelievingly, kissing her vivid little face. "Go

to bed, child, and don't talk to me about losing your temper."

At eleven o'clock the light was still burning in the office and Winnie knocked lightly on the door.

"I brought you a glass of milk and a sandwich, Hughie," she said, using the old pet name she had given him when a little lad.

"Well that's mighty thoughtful of you, Winnie dear," he said, smiling at her. "I've been doing a little thinking this evening and that's hungry work."

Winnie regarded him, wisdom and pride in her eyes.

"I'm thinking that healthy folks is more of a problem than sick ones," she observed sagely. "But you're enough like your mother, to be able to manage all right, never fear. You've her understanding and the endurance and will of your father, Hughie, and you'll be needing it all, but you'll work it out. Shirley is spoiled and we're all to blame—it wasn't all done in these two weeks, either; your mother gave in a little at a time for she was tired and her illness has been long coming. 'Tis nothing to set right a little wrong when the heart is pure gold like Shirley's. And you'll soon set Sarah in her place—she

needs to be set frequent-like, though if you find the way to her liking, she'll be fond enough of you in time. It's Rosemary I'd speak to you about at the risk of seeming to meddle."

The doctor stirred a little, but his face encouraged Winnie to go on.

"A rose in the bud—that's Rosemary," said Winnie who scorned to read poetry and often employed poetical fancies in her rather quaint phrasing. "A rose in the bud and a flower of a girl. A temper that blazes, a quick pride that bleeds at a word and a passion for loving that sometimes frightens me. The sick and the helpless and the young—Rosemary would mother 'em all. And she's hurt so easy, and she dashes herself against the stone wall so blindly—you'll be careful and patient, won't you, Hughie? For she has the Willis will, has Rosemary and times there is no holding her."

Doctor Hugh smiled into the anxious eyes, dim with the loving anxiety of many years.

"I'll be careful, Winnie," he promised. "And you'll help me. Thank you for telling me—what you have."

CHAPTER V

WINNIE'S VOLUNTEERS

FOR the first few days after Miss Wright's arrival it seemed that the proverb, "Many hands make light work" was to be the household motto. Winnie was fairly swamped with offers of help and "Miss Trudy" as she had asked Winnie to call her, and the three girls vied with each other as to which should be the most industrious.

"For I want to be useful, Winnie," said Aunt Trudy, a winning sincerity in her kind voice. "Only tell me what to do, because I don't want to interfere with your daily schedule."

"And Sarah and I will make the beds and dust," promised Rosemary, looking up from copying music.

"I'll run all your errands," chirped Shirley and was promptly rewarded with a hug.

Winnie was a shrewd and practical general, as her answers proved. A less experienced person would have made a vague reply, put off the

offers with a promise to "let you know when I need you" or politely told them "not to bother." Not so Winnie.

"Well, I'll tell you, Miss Trudy," she said capably, "I don't mind saying if you'll plan the meals, you'll be taking a load off my shoulders. I can cook and I can serve and I can keep things hot when the doctor is late as he'll be many a time; but unless I can have the three meals a day printed right out and hung on my kitchen door, I'm lost-like. It drives me wild to have to figure out what we should eat, when it's nothing at all, to my way of thinking, to cook it."

"I'll be glad to plan the menus," Aunt Trudy assured her. "Home I write out the meals for the whole week every Saturday morning; I'll do that for you without fail, Winnie."

"Thank you ma'am," Winnie replied. "Now Rosemary, if you want to help, you answer the telephone. I can't abide to be called away from my baking and sweeping to tell folks where the doctor is, or why he isn't here. I don't always get messages straight, so you take 'em and when you're not home, let Sarah do it."

"I like to answer the telephone," beamed Rosemary.

Winnie, orderly soul, proceeded to clinch the remaining two offers of assistance.

"Sarah, there's no one can beat you making beds, when you put your mind to it," she announced diplomatically. "You make the beds mornings, when Rosemary is doing her practising and I won't ask you to do another thing."

"But me?" urged Shirley. "What can I do, Winnie?"

"Bless your little heart, you run to the store for Winnie, and help her make cookies," cried Winnie, "that's enough for one little girl, dearie."

"I don't think any of us has much to do," observed Rosemary. "I can do lots more to help, Winnie. And so can Sarah."

"If you'll do just one thing and do it every day, I won't be complaining," Winnie returned. "You'll find it's easy to get tired and it's then you'll want to skip a day."

The girls were sure that nothing would induce them to "skip" a day, and Winnie went back to her kitchen well-pleased with her bestowal of commissions.

The house seemed strangely empty without the gentle little mother and at first time hung heavy on the three pairs of young hands. Doctor

Hugh was very busy adjusting his work to run smoothly and his hours were irregular so that he did not see much of his sisters. Then, as the mother's absence became an established fact, gradually old interests and friends absorbed their attention and normal life was resumed with the difference that a great gap was always present and unfilled. Aunt Trudy was kindness itself and overflowing with affection for her nieces, but her attitude toward them was that of a placid outsider, gently watching them from a little distance. Aunt Trudy did their mending exquisitely, because she liked to sew, but she would not leave the mending and come down stairs to meet Nina Edmonds, a new-comer to the neighborhood, though Rosemary was anxious to have every social courtesy shown the rather critical young person who seemed older than her thirteen years.

"I don't want to drop my work now, dearie," said Aunt Trudy in response to her niece's appeal. "I always lose my needle when I get up; I'll meet your little friend some other time. Ask her to dinner to-night if you wish—Winnie is going to have veal loaf and egg salad."

Rosemary acted on this suggestion, and Doctor Hugh, coming in late, was surprised to find

a fourth girl at the table, a freckle-faced little girl with light bobbed hair and incredibly thin arms and hands. Nina Edmonds talked incessantly and, after a few ineffectual attempts to carry on a conversation with his aunt, the young doctor devoted himself to his dinner, keeping, however, an observant eye on the guest and on Rosemary who listened in evident fascination to the steady stream of words. He had a call to make, immediately after dinner and was surprised and distinctly annoyed when he returned at half-past ten to find Nina and Rosemary still talking animatedly, their arms around each other, in the window seat. Aunt Trudy was placidly reading, and the younger girls had gone to bed.

"Is it late?" Rosemary started up as her brother came in.

"Half-past ten," he answered briefly. "I'll take you home, Miss Edmonds, if you'll tell me where you live. I'm afraid your mother will be worried about you."

"Oh, my mother never worries—she knows I'll come home all right," said Nina. "I didn't wear a coat, it was so warm—will I be cold in the car?"

"The car is in the garage," said the doctor grimly, holding open the door for her. "We'll

have to walk. Go to bed, Rosemary please," he flung over his shoulder. "Don't wait up for me."

There was a soft rush and a quick sigh, and Rosemary's arms went about his neck.

"Kiss me good night, Hugh," she whispered, "I'm sorry."

He held her close for a moment, then the screen door shut with a click, and they were gone.

"I hope Hugh didn't hurt Nina's feelings," worried Rosemary as she and Aunt Trudy went upstairs. "She doesn't have to go to bed at nine o'clock and she thinks it is queer that I do. I'm afraid she will call Hugh cross."

"Oh, I don't believe she will," said Aunt Trudy comfortably. "She seemed to me a nice little girl and you need plenty of young friends, darling."

Her new friend had made a great impression on Rosemary and Sarah was forced to listen the next day to glowing accounts that rather bored her. Sarah's present interests were confined to one sick rabbit and one well rabbit who lived in a hutch in the roomy side yard.

"I'm sick of hearing about Nina Edmonds," declared Sarah as they sat down to dinner the

following evening. "I don't call her anything wonderful."

Doctor Hugh had not come in, and Rosemary had volunteered to serve in his place. Aunt Trudy frankly disliked either carving or serving.

"I think she is lovely," maintained Rosemary, "and I'm going to have my hair bobbed like hers."

It was a warm night and under the glow of the electrolier Rosemary's magnificent hair curled and shone like polished bronze. Even Aunt Trudy stared at her, surprised, and the practical Sarah was moved to protest.

"I think your hair is nice the way it is," she said. "I'd leave it alone if I were you."

Winnie paused, on her way to the kitchen.

"Don't let Doctor Hugh hear you say any such nonsense," she scolded. "The idea! Bobbing a head of hair like that—it's going directly against the generosity of the Lord!"

"What is?" demanded a pleasant voice, and Doctor Hugh came into the room.

He had changed to a fresh linen suit at the Jordan office, as the town had designated it to distinguish it from his home office, and he looked so wholesome and clean and strong and smiling that the four faces brightened at once.

"You have to bring 'em up when I'm not around, don't you, Winnie?" he said humorously, slipping into the chair vacated by Rosemary. "What mischief are they into now?"

Winnie vanished into the kitchen, murmuring something about a salad, and Rosemary answered for her. Rosemary's blue eyes were unclouded.

"Winnie is mad because I am going to have my hair bobbed like Nina Edmonds'," she informed her brother. "I think bobbed hair is as pretty as it can be, don't you, Hugh?"

"It seems a pity when she has such nice hair," murmured Aunt Trudy weakly.

"Bob your hair!" thundered Doctor Hugh. "Of all the foolish notions, that is the worst. This comes from talking foolish clatter with that empty-headed silly little chit last night. The babbling brook must have been named for her."

"Yes, isn't she silly?" said Sarah scornfully. "Shirley doesn't like her, either."

"Nina Edmonds is my friend," began Rosemary, scarlet-cheeked. "You—"

"I beg your pardon, Rosemary," said the doctor instantly. "I honestly do. I had no right to speak like that. But you mustn't think of bobbing your curly mop, dear."

"Sarah's hair is bobbed," Rosemary pointed out.

"It was cut to make it grow," answered the doctor. "Mother told me. You certainly don't need to treat your hair to make it grow, Rosemary."

"Write and ask Mother," suggested Sarah.

"No, Mother isn't to be asked a single question for a year," Doctor Hugh announced firmly. "We'll settle our problems without bothering her. Rosemary is not to meddle with her hair —that's flat."

"Oh, Hugh, I want to bob it!" insisted Rosemary. "Ever so many of the girls do—not just Nina Edmonds, but half the girls in school. I don't see why you are so cross about it. Can't I get it cut to-morrow? Please?"

Doctor Hugh's dark eyes behind their glasses rested on the pretty, willful face.

"I said NO!" he repeated. "Once and for all, Rosemary, I positively forbid you to have your hair cut. Do you understand me?"

CHAPTER VI

ROSEMARY HAS HER WAY

"SARAH, Oh, Sarah! Sally Waters, I'm calling you!"

Sarah glanced up at the merry face regarding her over the fence and frowned.

"Well, what do you want?" she asked ungraciously. "Don't you dare call me Sally, Jack Welles!"

"I'll call you Sadie, then," said the boy obligingly. "Where's Rosemary?"

He was a short, stocky lad, between fifteen and sixteen years old, with a freckled snub nose, engaging brown eyes and a chin that promised well for future force of character.

"Where's Rosemary?" he asked again.

"I don't know—I haven't seen her since lunch," answered Sarah. "Don't you think Elinor looks better to-day, Jack?"

Elinor was the sick rabbit and Sarah waited Jack's decision anxiously.

"Sure, leave her alone and she'll come out all

right," he said heartlessly. "You're always fussing with animals, aren't you, Sarah? I believe you like 'em better when they're sick because it gives you an excuse to pet them more."

Sarah's brown, stolid little face kindled suddenly with passionate earnestness.

"Nobody cares!" she cried. "Nobody! Winnie wouldn't let me keep the sick kittens in the kitchen and they died and Elinor would have died, too, if it hadn't been for me. When I grow up, I'm going to have a big house and there isn't going to be a single person in it. Just animals—so there!"

"I suppose you'll have a trained cow to do the cooking, and a dog to wash dishes," teased Jack. "Never mind, Sarah, there'll always be plenty of animals needing a friend like you. Maybe Hugh will doctor them for you, and I'll come take your patients out for airings in my best and newest airplane!"

"Hello, what's all this confabbing?" called Doctor Hugh, coming across the grass toward the fence. "Rabbits improving, Sarah? Where's Rosemary?"

"Hello, Hugh," Jack greeted him with a cheerful grin. "All the patients cured this early in the day? Sarah is going to follow in your

footsteps, but she won't give her services to people, only to mistreated animals."

"I've been late for dinner two nights running and I thought I'd surprise the family by a punctual appearance this time," explained the doctor. "My chief difficulty now is to find some one to surprise. Aunt Trudy has gone to the library, Winnie says, Shirley is playing with some neighbor's child on the porch and no one seems to know where Rosemary is. I saw you and Sarah from upstairs, or I should have added her to the list of the missing, too."

"I wanted to show Rosemary my new fishing rod," Jack explained. "It's a beauty and my uncle sent it to me from Canada."

Sarah stood up and shook a lapful of dirt from her frock.

"I think you are cruel to catch fish," she said indignantly.

"Why you eat fish, don't you?" retorted Jack. "Someone has to catch them, you know."

Poor Sarah had no answer for this argument and she turned and retreated to the house without another word.

"Queer little dick, isn't she?" smiled Jack to the doctor. "Crazy about animals and always fussing over 'em. Well, I have to go dig worms

IT WAS HER HAIR THAT HELD HER BROTHER'S ATTENTION.

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for bait—great day ahead to-morrow with nothing to do but fish and try out the new rod."

"Good luck to you," called Doctor Hugh, going back to his office to indulge in the rare luxury of a half hour's reading.

Vaguely he heard Aunt Trudy come in, speak to the two little girls on the porch, and go on upstairs. He knew when Sarah came down because she played "chop sticks" on the piano till Winnie came and called her to go after a loaf of bread. The doctor wondered lazily if the bread were a real need or a handy invention of Winnie's to break up the musical program; she was quite capable of the latter. After the piano was silenced, he lost himself again in his book to be recalled by an undecided knock on the door. He waited, not sure that it *was* a knock. The timid tap came again and he called, "Come in." The door opened, closed, and Rosemary stood facing him, her back against it. In her hands she held a brown paper parcel.

Doctor Hugh stared at her in genuine amazement. She was breathing quickly, as though she had been running, and the lovely color flooded her face. Her eyes were almost black with excitement and a touch of fear. But it was her hair that held her brother's attention.

Gone was the rippling glory, the gold-red mane that had reached to the girl's waist. In its place was a soft aureole of hair, standing out fluffily on the small head and curling under at the ends.

Anger flamed in Doctor Hugh's face, then receded, leaving him white. Before he could speak Rosemary's eyes filled with tears.

"Oh, Hugh!" she sobbed. "I want my hair! And it's gone!"

For answer her brother opened his arms and she fled into them. She clung to him frantically while she wept out her remorse and grief.

"I didn't know it was going to be like this," she wailed, sobs shaking the slender shoulders. "The barber didn't want to cut it, but I made him. And then, as soon as I saw it on the floor, I began to cry. Oh, Hugh, I'm so sorry—I don't want short hair at all! And what can I do?"

The doctor said nothing for a little while, only smoothed the cropped head with a gentle touch. Presently when Rosemary sat up and wiped her eyes, he motioned toward the parcel still in her hands.

"It's—it's my hair," stammered Rosemary. "The barber tied it up for me—he said I might want a switch some time."

"Well you won't!" declared Doctor Hugh with decision. "Leave it here with me, dear, and I'll see that a lock is saved for Mother. You mustn't feel so badly, Rosemary. The hair will grow again, you know. And it is very pretty, still."

"Hugh," said Rosemary solemnly, "why do I have to find things out for myself? I didn't know that I hated bobbed hair till I had mine cut—why am I like that?"

"Oh, my dear," the doctor smiled a little sadly, "why do we all want our own way at any cost? You wouldn't believe that I knew better in this instance, would you?"

Rosemary blushed and looked ashamed.

"I'm glad to have this opportunity to speak to you alone, dear," the doctor went on. "You've had your hair cut because I forbade it and now you are sorry, but what about the next time? It's silly to think you can go through life and always have your own way, child. No one can. Each one of us must acknowledge some authority. I'm a good many years older than you girls and I've had more experience and discipline and at present I am taking Mother's place; you'll have to accept my decisions for the time being. If I exact obedience, Rosemary, it

isn't because I am a tyrant—I've put in a good many years obeying orders myself and I know that obedience is a valuable lesson."

"Have you a temper, Hugh?" asked Rosemary, shyly. "Have you the Willis will?"

Doctor Hugh's mouth twitched.

"Guilty on both counts," he admitted. "I'm a cross, cranky old brother with a gun-powder temper that sometimes gets the best of me. As for the Willis will—what do you think about that, Rosemary?"

"Winnie is always talking about it," said Rosemary. "She says I have it and so have Sarah and Shirley. I suppose it is very wrong."

"Don't you believe it!" announced the doctor. "Not a bit of it. A good, strong will is a virtue, child, and please remember that. But, of course, you want to train it—flying in the face of orders isn't a proof of will power; more often it is foolish obstinacy. A stiff will keeps us from being persuaded to do wrong, from tumbling into pitfalls. It is the weak-willed person who yields to temptation. You and I, and Shirley and Sarah, have constantly to remember that we have the Willis will and are proud of it; and then resolve not to yield easily to the little devils of temper and disobedience and false pride. Which

is the end of my sermon and long enough it's been!"

The big swivel chair accommodated them comfortably and Rosemary remained in her brother's lap quietly, her eyes downcast. He watched her silently. At last she raised her face bravely.

"Are you going to punish me?" she asked clearly.

He shook his head.

"I know you are sorry," he replied. "Punishments are only to help us remember, and you are not going to forget, are you? But I tell you what I am going to do—ask you to give up Nina Edmonds as a chum."

Rosemary was silent.

"You do not have to be unkind or discourteous," continued the doctor's even voice. "Just do not go over to her house so often and by and by she will not come to see you. Play more with Shirley and Sarah, dear—they look up to you and love you so."

"Don't you like Nina—but I know you don't," Rosemary answered her own question.

"Since we are talking confidentially," said Doctor Hugh and Rosemary felt a thrill of pleasure at his tone, "I'll tell you my real reasons

for objecting to Nina as a friend for you. She is too old—that's all. What is she—thirteen?—well, she has all the ideas and manners of a girl of eighteen. And you're still a little girl, Rosemary, thank fortune. I don't want you to grow up too fast and it would break Mother's heart to come home and find a grown up daughter in the place of the little girl she left. Be twelve years old while you can, honey, for the minute you are thirteen you leave that happy year forever. I'm a serious old codger this afternoon, am I not? But we understand each other better, don't we?"

"Oh, yes!" Rosemary threw her arms around his neck. "I love you most to pieces!" she confided.

From that moment Rosemary began to worship her brother with all the depth and power of her warm and affectionate nature. She did not immediately become a model of obedience and she often disputed his edicts and decisions. There were misunderstandings and tears and many hard lessons to be learned still ahead. But Hugh would never again be a stranger with her respect and love yet to be won. She could admire his strength of will and purpose whole heartedly and as she contrasted them with Aunt

Trudy's characteristics, Rosemary insensibly found her aunt wanting.

She said something of this to Jack Welles the day after the memorable hair cutting. Rosemary had endured the comments and questions of the household at dinner that night with fair composure, but she had flared up in wrath at Jack's laughter when he first met her the following afternoon.

"My mother says it is extremely ill-bred to indulge in comments on a person's personal appearance," declared Rosemary heatedly. "My hair is a part of my personal appearance."

"What a dub you were to have it cut," said Jack, sobering. "But it might look worse, Rosemary, honestly it might. I think it is rather becoming with those ends curling under like that."

Rosemary permitted herself to be calmed.

"It's fun to brush it," she laughed. "And my head feels as light as a feather."

"What did Hugh say?" asked Jack curiously. "Or didn't you ask him? And Aunt Trudy makes such a fuss about your hair—wasn't she horrified?"

Rosemary's expressive face shadowed.

"Hugh was just dear to me!" she said enigmati-

cally, "but Aunt Trudy was so silly. She cried and cried and said what would my mother say and wasn't I ever going to have any respect for her wishes—she is so tiresome, she really is, Jack."

"Then you must have been told not to have it bobbed and went ahead like your usual perverse small self," declared Jack shrewdly. "I'll bet Hugh didn't weep though—he looks to me as though he could talk to you like a Dutch uncle."

"Well I don't care if he did!" said Rosemary. "I'd rather be scolded or punished than cried over. And Aunt Trudy doesn't cry because she is sorry—she does it to get her own way. That's the way she makes us mind—she cries and says we don't love her and that makes us feel mean.

"But I don't think it is fair one bit and afterward I'm so mad I could throw a sofa cushion at her. You needn't look at me like that, Jack Welles! Your aunt doesn't cry over *you*."

CHAPTER VII

THE RUNAWAY

JUNE slipped quietly into July and with the long, hot sunny days came the inclination to slight regular tasks as Winnie had predicted. Sarah tried to beg off from making the beds morning after morning and Shirley began to grumble when called from her play to go to the store. Aunt Trudy declared that the heat always affected her and demanded an electric fan in her room and drove Winne frantic with repeated requests for ice-water. Rosemary alone remained faithful to her duties, feeling the responsibility of an oldest daughter. She answered the many calls on the telephone, kept the messages straight and even wrote out the cards for the office file. Doctor Hugh declared he did not know what he should do without her. When Sarah left her work undone, it was Rosemary who finished it for her, Rosemary who listened sympathetically to Aunt Trudy's complaints about the weather, Rosemary who coaxed Shir-

ley into clean frocks and amiability each afternoon and tried to soothe Winnie when Sarah's side-yard menagerie insisted on invading the house.

"Rosemary, this is the second time Shirley has stayed away from lunch," declared Aunt Trudy one noon. "Don't you think I should speak to your brother about it?"

"Oh, no, Aunt Trudy, not right away," protested Rosemary, her troubled eyes wandering to the little sister's vacant place. "I don't believe she really means to run away. I'll get her to promise not to go out of the yard and she will be all right. Shirley never broke her promise yet."

"Sarah ought to play with her more, instead of fussing with those silly rabbits," said Aunt Trudy severely.

"I do play with her," retorted Sarah irritably. "I play with her lots. But she likes Rosemary. I can't help it if she gets mad at me and goes to play with those Bailey children, can I? Rosemary is always practising."

This was not quite fair on Sarah's part, for Rosemary though devoted to her music and already an advanced pupil, seldom practised more than an hour in the morning and another in the

afternoon. The fact was that six year old Shirley was developing the running-away habit at an alarming rate.

She came home late that afternoon, tired and cross, and to Rosemary's questions returned the briefest answers. Yes, she had been playing with the Bailey children. No, not in their yard. No, they had not gone with her when she went further on. She had gone by herself. Yes, she had had some lunch, a pound of sweet crackers.

"Where did you get them?" asked Rosemary, who was brushing the sunny hair.

"At the grocery," admitted Shirley.

"But you didn't have any money, dear, did you?" said Rosemary in surprise.

"I charged 'em—Mr. Holmes said it would be all right," announced Shirley complacently.

"Shirley Willis! And you know Mother positively never allows us to charge a thing unless she orders it," cried Rosemary. "What do you suppose Hugh would say? Did you eat a whole pound?"

No, Shirley confessed, she had had crackers to give away. She had given some to a strange dog and some to a little boy and girl she met.

"What little boy and girl?" demanded Rose-

mary, beginning to feel that this youngest sister was too much for her. "Where did you meet them?"

"At the dump lot," said Shirley sweetly.

Rosemary stared at her. The "dump lot" was on the other side of the town and furnished an annual topic of discussion for the Eastshore Woman's Club. To it the town refuse and garbage was carted and it was regularly hauled over and searched by bands of men, women and children intent on salvage.

"What shall I do with you?" groaned poor Rosemary. "After this, you'll have to stay in the yard, Shirley. You know Hugh would scold if he heard you were playing in the dump lot. Promise Sister you won't go away from the house to-morrow morning."

Shirley, looking more than ever like an adorable cherub in freshly ironed pink chambray, shook her head naughtily.

"I might want to go," she argued.

"But you mustn't!" Rosemary's voice was earnest. "You can't run all over town like this, darling. You'll be run over by an automobile, or something dreadful will happen to you. Promise to stay in your own yard like a good girl."

Shirley would not promise. The worried Rosemary went to Winnie.

"I don't want to tell Hugh," she explained, "he's busy and when he's home Shirley is so cunning and funny I don't believe he thinks she can be naughty. Besides Mother told me to look after the children—what can I do, Winnie?" and Rosemary, a child herself waited Winnie's reply anxiously.

"Running away is something most children go through," pronounced Winnie. "You never had the trick, Rosemary, but Hugh did and so did Sarah. Your father spanked Hugh and cured him and your mother and I together cured Sarah. We tied her to a tree with a rope and she was so ashamed to have the other children see her that she promised not to leave the yard without permission."

"But Shirley won't promise," said Rosemary. "She keeps saying she might want to go. Aunt Trudy thinks we should tell Hugh about her."

"Well I think myself he might be able to break her of the trick," admitted Winnie. "Shirley thinks a heap of him and yet she's a little afraid of him too. But I'm like you, Rosemary—I hate to bother him just now. He's

worried about that hospital case and last night he was called out twice."

"Could we tie Shirley to a tree?" asked Rosemary hopefully.

"She's too big for that," Winnie advised her. "Sarah was only three years old when that was tried. Shirley would untie the knots or cut the rope or get someone to unloose her. No, we'll have to keep a good watch on her and trust to making her see she's doing wrong. You can reason with Shirley, if she is only six years old."

"Oh dear," sighed Rosemary, quite worn out with her experiences, "I never knew it was so hard to bring up children!"

"Biggest job in the world," Winnie said shortly. "Mothers never rest and their work is never done."

The next morning Rosemary coaxed Sarah to play paper dolls with Shirley on the porch while she practised and she went to her music with a clear conscience. For an hour the scales and trills sounded and wound up with a grand march for good measure. Stepping out on the porch Rosemary found it deserted, the paper dolls scattered on the rug, the box overturned where the children had left it.

"Shirley!" cried Rosemary. "Sarah!"

"I'm cleaning the rabbit house," shouted Sarah, and Rosemary hurried around to the side yard.

"Where's Shirley?" she demanded anxiously.

"Shirley? Isn't she on the porch?" Sarah's dirt-streaked face peered through the wire netting which surrounded her pets.

"No, she isn't, and I'm afraid she has run away again," said Rosemary, troubled. "How long ago did you leave her, Sarah?"

"Oh, about half an hour," replied Sarah carelessly. "She wanted to cut out more dolls and I got her the scissors and asked her if she minded if I came and cleaned the pens. Elinor gets sick so easily I don't like to let the house go without cleaning it every other day."

"Bother Elinor!" said Rosemary impatiently. "Come help me look for Shirley. Hugh is coming home for lunch—he telephoned and Winnie answered it."

They hunted through the house, but no Shirley could be found. Rosemary even went to two or three of the nearest neighbors, but the small girl was not there.

"Shirley? I saw her going down the street with her express wagon," volunteered Ray Anderson, a four year old boy who lived a few doors

away. "She was on the other side of the street."

"If I knew where to go look for her, I would," said the worried Rosemary, "but there are twenty streets she could be on. I'll run over to the dump lot, Sarah; perhaps she has gone there again."

"You'll have to run all the way, if you get back by half-past twelve," observed Sarah dispassionately. "Aunt Trudy said she was going to tell Hugh the next time any of us were late to meals."

And though Rosemary ran most of the way to the dump lot on the other side of town—where a single hasty glance satisfied her that Shirley was not among the groups engaged in pulling over the unsavory messes—and all the way back, the others were seated at the luncheon table when she reached the house. She heard a distinct rumble of thunder as she entered the door.

"Mercy, child, how hot you look!" was Aunt Trudy's greeting. "I don't see why you girls don't try to come to your meals on time; I take so much pains to have the things you like and Winnie is such a good cook. And yet the three of you haven't been punctual for a week."

"I'm afraid I set them a bad example," smiled Doctor Hugh. "Let's form a compact—when

Aunt Trudy tells me that not one of you has been late for a week to any meal, I'll have the clock fixed."

The dining-room clock was an old joke in the Willis family. It was a cuckoo clock and had been broken for more than a year, but remained one of those things that are never attended to. Several times a week the little mother had mentioned that the dining-room clock really must be mended, but it was always forgotten. Since Hugh had been home he had often declared that the clock must be fixed but it still remained mute and useless.

"Shirley loves to hear the cuckoo call," said Rosemary, and instantly regretted her remark.

"Where is Shirley?" was the doctor's natural question.

"I dare say she's run away again," announced Aunt Trudy, her tone resigned.

"Run away?" repeated Doctor Hugh sharply. "Why, what do you mean?"

"Well, Hugh I'm sorry to tell you, but Shirley has run away several times lately," said Aunt Trudy. "She has been absent from lunch twice this week. I've talked to her and I know Rosemary has, but nothing seems to do any good."

A vivid flash of lightning, followed by a roar

of thunder and a sudden torrent of rain heralded the arrival of the thunder shower.

"Do you mean to tell me that that baby has been allowed to run around this town alone?" demanded the doctor sternly. "What have you been thinking of? What have you all been doing?"

"Well she is very self-willed," offered Aunt Trudy, "and I have no strength left this hot weather. I said yesterday that you ought to know about it."

"Why didn't you tell him, then?" suggested Sarah impertinently.

"That will do," said her brother. "Rosemary, how long has Shirley been gone?"

"About an hour now," admitted Rosemary reluctantly. "I've been over to the dump lot, Hugh, and she isn't there."

"The dump lot!" ejaculated the doctor. "Is that where Shirley is in the habit of going? Suppose you tell me about this and how long it has been going on."

The shrill ring of the telephone bell interrupted Rosemary's recital. Doctor Hugh answered it. He came back to the dining-room frowning, yet oddly enough looking relieved.

"Shirley is in the Moreland police station," he

announced. "She was picked up during the height of the storm with her express wagon. I'll go over in the car and bring her home. Want to come, Rosemary?"

Rosemary did, and the sun was shining out again as they took their places in the roadster.

"Don't look so sober, dear," said Doctor Hugh, glancing at the grave face close to his shoulder. "I'm not blaming you, except that I wish you had told me at once. This experience will probably quite cure Shirley from running off. Heigh-o, I wonder what you girls will think of to do next?"

Moreland was the town adjoining Eastshore, and ten minutes' ride brought them to the door of the police station. Rosemary clung tightly to her brother's arm as they went up the steps.

"There is nothing to be afraid of," he assured her.

Then someone folded back one of the heavy oak doors and they found themselves in a large, bare room.

CHAPTER VIII

SARAH IN DISGRACE

THE first person Rosemary saw was Shirley, looking very small and forlorn. She sat on a chair so high that her little feet dangled in mid-air. One hand clutched a half eaten bun, the other held a scarcely tasted glass of milk.

"Oh Rosemary!" cried the familiar little voice. "I'm so glad you've come!"

An obliging man in a blue uniform took the bun and the glass of milk and Rosemary hugged Shirley tightly.

"How could you run away again, darling?" the older sister whispered reproachfully. "You worried us so! Were you out in the rain?"

"Only a little," said Shirley, restored to cheerfulness now that Rosemary was here to take care of her.

"She got frightened when it began to thunder," the sergeant at the desk was saying to Doctor Hugh. "As nearly as I can make out, from what she says, she started to run at the first clap,

and ran away from her home, instead of toward it. She crossed the line from Eastshore into Moreland before Jim Doran found her, running as hard as she could and jerking the express wagon behind her and crying as though her heart would break. He brought her here and as soon as she calmed down a bit and told us her name and address, we telephoned you. Oh, no thanks due us at all—we get a lost child every week or so. But you ought to break her of running away—the automobile traffic is so heavy, specially in the summer time, it's dangerous for a child to be crossing the streets alone."

Doctor Hugh shook hands with the sergeant and turned toward Rosemary and Shirley.

"Come here, Shirley," he said quietly.

A little frightened, Shirley approached him dubiously. He lifted her gently and swung her to the top of the table before the sergeant's desk.

"There's a sand box and a box of sand toys coming to our house to-morrow," he said unexpectedly, "but I couldn't think of letting a little runaway girl touch them. Perhaps I had better send them back to the store."

A sand-box had been one of Shirley's fondest wishes.

"Oh, no, Hugh," she begged, "Don't send them back, please don't. I won't run away again, ever. Honestly."

"Will you promise not to leave the yard again unless you first ask Rosemary or Winnie or Aunt Trudy?" asked the doctor.

"Yes," nodded Shirley instantly.

"Well then, if you are not going to run away again, I'll keep the sand-box," decided Doctor Hugh. "And now we must be getting home for I have a busy afternoon ahead of me."

The sergeant shook hands with Shirley and told her that she was wise to make up her mind to play in her own yard. His little girl, he said, never ran away. The blue-coated man who had taken the bun and the milk, carried the express wagon down and put it in the car, and fifteen minutes later Shirley was deposited safely on her own front porch.

The sand-box and the toys came the next morning and Shirley played for hours with them. Sometimes she induced Sarah to play with her, but more often that young person was otherwise engaged. She had a lame cat to care for now in addition to the rabbits and Winnie declared that if it came to a choice between cream for her aunt's

tea or the cat, she wouldn't trust Sarah with the bottle.

"I don't think you have a very kind heart, Winnie," said Sarah one morning when she had been discovered in a raid on the refrigerator.

"Well I have some conscience and you haven't, or you wouldn't be wanting to feed loin chops that cost forty-five cents a pound to a cat," declared Winnie grimly.

"Sick animals need good food," maintained Sarah, swinging on the screen door, a habit which invariably irritated Winnie.

"Go on out and play, do," she now advised Sarah. "How can I get my work done with you buzzing around me like a fly! Well what do you suppose struck the child that minute—" Winnie broke off in amazement. Sarah had dashed around to the front of the house, banging the screen door noisily behind her. Not curious enough to speculate further, Winnie went on with her task of scrubbing the table top already immaculate in its snowy purity.

Aunt Trudy was descending the front stairs leisurely an hour or two later, pleasantly contemplating the nearness of the lunch hour, when the door bell rang sharply. Really it sounded as though someone had jabbed it viciously.

Aunt Trudy approached the door with reproving dignity.

"You're Miss Wright, aren't you?" said a rasped voice. "Well, I'm Mrs. Anderson and I want to tell you that something has got to be done to Sarah; that child is simply unbearable. She slapped the face of my Ray this morning and the poor lamb came into the house crying with pain. He's only four years old, and I think when a great girl of nine takes to slapping babies' faces, she needs a sound whipping. No, I won't come in, but I was determined you should know about it. That child will end up in prison if her temper isn't curbed."

"No one ever spoke to me like that, Hugh," complained Aunt Trudy tearfully to her nephew when he came in a few minutes later. "She didn't give me a chance to say a word. I'm sure I don't approve of Sarah slapping any one's face."

"Of course you don't," agreed the doctor soothingly. "Where is the culprit? We'll see what she has to say for herself. Look here, Sarah," he opened fire as that young person came up the porch steps and into the hall, "Mrs. Anderson says you slapped Ray's face this morning."

"Well?" inquired Sarah coolly.

"Did you?" said the doctor matching her briefness.

"I certainly did," Sarah assured him. "He is a bad, cruel boy and I wish I had slapped him harder. He was stepping on poor baby ants!"

Aunt Trudy stared in astonishment, but something pathetic in Sarah's defiant little figure touched Doctor Hugh. She so evidently considered she had vindicated herself.

"That wasn't being kind, was it?" he said gently, "but, Sarah, slapping his face didn't teach him not to step on ants—it merely taught him that one of his neighbors was a very impolite little girl. I want you to go over now and apologize to Mrs. Anderson."

"But I slapped Ray," hedged Sarah cannily.

"Well Ray is so little he probably doesn't hold malice," explained Doctor Hugh seriously. "It is Mrs. Anderson's feelings that are hurt; don't you think you are a little ashamed, Sarah, to know you struck a child so much younger than you are?"

"Go and tell her you are sorry, dearie," suggested Aunt Trudy.

"I won't say I am sorry, because that would be a lie," said Sarah virtuously.

"If you are not sorry you slapped Ray you

ought to be, because such an act is the height of discourtesy," declared the doctor. "However, if you apologize, I don't doubt that will be satisfactory. Go right away, Sarah."

"I think Mrs. Anderson should apologize to us," announced Sarah with explosive suddenness. "She came over here telling tales and that is the meanest thing any one can do. You hate tale-bearers, you said so Hugh."

The doctor's long-suffering patience snapped.

"What Mrs. Anderson does is no concern of yours," he said testily. "If you do not go to her house immediately and apologize, Sarah, I'll march you over there and wait while you do it. I've listened to all the argument I intend to."

"I'll go," surrendered Sarah sullenly.

What she said could only be conjectured but apparently Mrs. Anderson was mollified for peace reigned the remainder of the week. Sunday afternoon though, a fresh storm broke, with Sarah again the center.

"Where's Sarah?" Doctor Hugh demanded, meeting Rosemary in the hall on his return from a round of calls.

Rosemary was dressed in white and ready for a sedate walk with Aunt Trudy.

"She's in your office, reading," she answered. "She likes the goat skin rug, you know."

"All right," nodded the doctor, "run along, chick, and tell Aunt Trudy to keep on the shady side of the street. The sun is blazing."

Sarah was not visible from the door, but walking around his desk, her brother discovered her stretched full length in her favorite reading attitude, on the white goat skin rug. Her book dealt with the health of cats.

"Sarah," began the doctor looking down at her, "did you take a telephone message from Mrs. Anderson yesterday morning?"

Sarah looked obstinate.

"Did you?" her brother insisted. "Answer me," he commanded, pulling her to her feet.

"Yes I did," muttered Sarah. "Rosemary was busy practising and Winnie's bread was in the oven."

"Why didn't you tell me she wanted me to call there Saturday night?" demanded the doctor sternly.

" 'Cause," murmured Sarah uneasily.

"You're ashamed to tell me, and I don't wonder," Doctor Hugh said crisply. "You'd let a miserable little thing like an apology you were

forced to make her, interfere with your loyalty to service. I thought you were bigger than that, Sarah," he added.

Sarah said nothing.

"If you were a nurse in a hospital or a doctor's office, you'd be dismissed," her brother went on, "for all you know I might have been needed seriously. As it happened, no harm was done, but that doesn't excuse you. Hereafter you are not to answer the phone under any circumstances. You can't be trusted to deliver the messages you receive."

If he had only known it, Doctor Hugh had delivered a severe blow to Sarah's pride. She had been extremely proud of her ability to answer the telephone and welcomed the rare opportunities when Rosemary was out or busy with her beloved music. But she said nothing and after a day or two the doctor realized that she was not on "speaking terms" with him.

"She ought to be spanked," he confided to Winnie, "but I don't believe in that form of punishment for children as old as she is."

"It wouldn't do any good," said Winnie, "your mother spanked her years ago when she'd take these silent fits. It only made her more obstinate. You can do more with Sarah, Hughie,

by helping her out of a tight place than any way I know. She's always getting into trouble and she never forgets the ones that stand by her. You keep your eyes open and the chance will come."

The opportunity came sooner than either of them expected. For nearly a week Jack Welles had been storming, to any one who would listen to him, about the "low-down" thief who nightly took his can of fishing worms.

"Plumb lazy, I call it," grumbled Jack, "to cart away the worms a fellow breaks his back digging. Some worthless tramp is catching fish with my worms and I intend to catch him."

His wails had reached the ears of Doctor Hugh, himself an ardent fisherman when time permitted and his sympathies were entirely with the defrauded one.

"Sit up some night and watch," he advised the lad. "Put the can in the usual place—where do you keep it—on the back step?—all right, put it there, and then hide back of the willow tree. You say it is done sometime between ten and twelve, for you go to bed at ten and your father comes home at midnight and finds the can empty? That ought to make it easy for you, for you know when to watch for the thief."

Jack's father was engaged in some delicate electrical experiments that were conducted in his factory at night to escape the vibration caused by the heavy machines.

Coming home from the Jordan office a little after then the next night after he had given Jack his advice, Doctor Hugh remembered what he had said and wondered if the boy had been successful in detecting the thief. As he neared the Welles house he heard loud and angry voices.

CHAPTER IX

WHEN PATIENCE SLIPS

"IF I ever catch you touching my can of worms again, I'll—I'll—" words apparently failed Jack and he began to sputter.

"Got him, Jack?" the doctor leaped the hedge lightly and ran diagonally across the lawn to the back of the Welles's house.

"Him?" growled Jack in disgust. "Him! Look at this—" and he flashed a pocket light that revealed to the asonished Doctor Hugh the tear-streaked face of Sarah.

"For the love of Mike!" gasped her brother. "Have you been taking Jack's worms?"

"Yes she has," Jack answered for her. "She's been dumping the can out every night. And if she does it again I'll shake her if she is a girl."

"Hold on, hold on," said Doctor Hugh pacifically. "Let's get the hang of this; why did you empty Jack's can of worms, Sarah?"

"It—it hurts them to be jabbed with a hook," wept Sarah.

"Like fun it does," retorted Jack scornfully. "Worms haven't any feelings, hardly."

"Well fishes have and if you haven't any worms you can't catch fishes," stormed Sarah. "I will too throw away your worms."

"You will not!" flashed Jack, taking a step toward her.

Sarah, the defiant, turned and fled toward her brother. He put his arm about her and found that she was shaking with nervous sobbing.

"I'll see you to-morrow, Jack," he said quietly. "There is no use in rousing the whole neighborhood. Come on, Sarah, we're going home."

He lifted the little girl in his arms and strode across the grass, entering the door of the house noiselessly and depositing her in a large arm chair in the office. Then he went into the kitchen, warmed a glass of milk and made her drink it.

"Now tell me all about it," he said, sitting down at his desk to face her. Sarah, he knew, had a horror of being "fussed over" and he did not dare pet her though he wished his mother were there to cuddle the pathetic little figure in her arms.

"I emptied the can every night, after Jack

went to bed," said Sarah. "That's all. He doesn't care how much he hurts them, but I do."

"But how could you stay awake from eight till ten o'clock?" asked the doctor curiously, "and how could you come down stairs without waking Shirley or being seen by Aunt Trudy or Winnie?"

"I didn't go to bed, that is not really," confided Sarah. "I lay down with all my clothes on, because Rosemary always comes in to see that our light is out before she goes to bed. But after nine o'clock I stayed up till I saw Jack shut the kitchen door of his house and then I knew he was through digging worms."

"Didn't you ever go to sleep before Rosemary came in to look at you?" asked her brother. "Not once?"

"Not once," said Sarah firmly. "I put three of Shirley's building blocks under my back so I couldn't. And when I got up I sat on the window sill so if I went to sleep I'd wake up when I fell out."

"Well you are thorough," admitted the doctor. "Weren't you afraid Aunt Trudy would come in and find you sitting up? Or hear you falling out of the window?"

"I didn't fall," declared Sarah, matter-of-factly. "And Aunt Trudy never comes to see if we are in bed. Mother used to, every night."

"I see," the doctor frowned a little. "Well, Sarah, you'll have to let Jack's worms alone after this. I'm not going to argue with you about the feelings of the worms or the fish (you'll get that point better when you are a little older) but I'll put it to you this way; they're Jack's worms and you mustn't touch what belongs to him. And, also, you can't go about making people think as you do. If you don't believe in fishing, all right; you are at perfect liberty not to fish. But you have no call to try to stop other people from fishing. Jack may not approve of the way you keep your rabbits. He may think they should be turned loose and allowed to destroy the garden. If he came over here night after night and let your rabbits out, think how angry you would be. Do you see, dear? You do what you feel to be right and let the other fellow keep tabs on his own conscience."

Sarah thought a few minutes.

"Well, I will," she sighed reluctantly. "Worms are awfully nasty things, anyway, Hugh. I had to pick some of them out of the

can with my fingers, because they wouldn't come out."

"Then we're all serene again," said her brother cheerfully. "And now it is after eleven and high time you were asleep."

Sarah gave him a quick, shy kiss at the head of the stairs and vanished into her room. She was always chary of caresses and her mother declared that she could count the times Sarah had voluntarily kissed her.

The last two weeks of July were an unbroken "hot spell." Eastshore was ordinarily comfortable in the summer time but the heat wave that gripped the country made itself felt and not all the pleasant effect of wide lawns and old shade trees could counteract the hot, humid nights and the blazing, parched days. An occasional thunder shower did its best to bring comfort, but the heat closed in again after each gust, seemingly more intense than ever. It was a trying test for tempers and dispositions and the Willis household began to develop "nerves."

"I should think you children could manage to remember to shut the screens doors behind you," remarked Doctor Hugh one morning at the breakfast table. "If there is one thing positively unendurable, it is flies in the house!"

Winnie put down the cream pitcher beside his cup of coffee with an emphasis that threatened to spray him with its contents.

"You'd better be speaking to Sarah," she said grimly. "I'm about wore out, arguing with her. She won't let me use the fly-batter at all and why? Because it is cruel to kill the dear darling little flies that tramp all over our food with their filthy feet!"

Rosemary giggled. She sat in Aunt Trudy's place, cool and neat in a blue gingham dress, her charming bobbed head making a pretty picture silhouetted against the light of the window behind her. The warm weather had reconciled Rosemary to the loss of her hair. Aunt Trudy often pleaded a headache mornings and Rosemary took her place at the silver tray and poured her brother's coffee.

"Don't let me hear any more such nonsense," said he sternly now. "Keep the screens closed, Winnie, and kill any flies that get in. Sarah, you are not to interfere in any way—and don't scowl like that."

For reply Sarah kicked the table leg to the peril of her glass of milk and Shirley's.

"You'll find yourself sent away from the table

in another minute," her brother warned her. "Eat your breakfast and behave yourself."

"You'll be sorry when I'm dead," said Sarah, her voice plaintive with self-pity.

Shirley thought the moment auspicious to make a reach for a hot biscuit. Over went her glass of milk and her fat little hand landed in the butter dish. The telephone bell saved her, as far as Doctor Hugh was concerned, and when he came back to tell Rosemary that he would not be home till dinner time and to give her a list of the time and places when he could be reached during the day, Winnie had removed all traces of the accident.

"I guess you must think I'm a washing machine," she grumbled after the doctor had gone. "That's the tenth clean runner we've had on the table this week. If we were using table cloths every meal I'd have to give up—no living woman could keep this family in table cloths!"

"Sarah, are you going to make the beds this morning?" asked Rosemary, on her way to sweep the porch, a duty she had assumed.

"No, I'm not," returned Sarah with characteristic candor. "It's too hot. Let 'em air till night. I want to play in the sand-box."

"Ray Anderson and me's going to play in the sand-box," said Shirley. "You can't come—you take all the toys."

"Oh, Shirley, how cross you are!" cried Rosemary, aghast at the frown on Shirley's pretty forehead. "Don't be so cranky, darling. Sarah will play in one end of the box and you play in the other."

But Sarah, her nose in the air, announced that she wouldn't "have a thing to do with the old sand-box," and she departed to sit in the swing and read, leaving Rosemary to make the beds or "let them air" as she decided.

Rosemary finished sweeping the porch and had just begun to make her own bed, when her aunt called her.

"Shirley and that little Anderson boy are making so much noise, I can't rest," Aunt Trudy complained. "I should think you could tell them to play quietly, Rosemary. And I wish you wouldn't practise this morning, dearie; my head is splitting and the piano does annoy me so. This afternoon I'll take my sewing out under the tree and you may have two hours to yourself, if you like."

Rosemary went down and suggested to Shirley and Ray that they make sand pies instead of

building a railroad, knowing from experience that sand pies was a comparatively quiet play. Then she dusted her beloved piano with a little lump in her throat. Mother had loved to hear her practise and had liked to sit on summer mornings in a chair close by, sewing and listening. Mother was an accomplished musician and she knew and noted her little daughter's enthusiastic progress. One reason that Rosemary practised so steadily through the warm weather in spite of discouragement was her determination to surprise her mother by her improvement when that dear lady came back to them.

"It's a shame you have all the beds to do, Rosemary," said Winnie, coming up for a salve from the medicine closet in the bathroom and discovering Rosemary wearily putting the bedrooms to rights. "I've burned my finger on that silly hot water heater again. I've told the doctor and told him to have the plumber stop in and fix it, but he forgets every time."

"I'll telephone Mr. Mertz," said Rosemary absently.

"You ought to make Sarah do her part," went on Winnie, spreading salve on a piece of gauze and binding it around her finger. "I'm tired trying to get any help from her. And Miss

Trudy wants ice-water every minute of the day and if I don't get it for her she comes out to the refrigerator and wastes half a block, hacking it. Shirley wants nothing but hot breads and meat and first thing we know she'll be sick on our hands."

Winnie sat on the edge of the bath-tub and let her mind dwell on her woes. Rosemary tried to listen sympathetically, but she was warm and tired and if Winnie would only go perhaps she could finish the rooms in time to read a little before lunch. The afternoon would have to be given over to her delayed practising.

"Well, I'm going down stairs," said Winnie, putting the salve jar back on its shelf, "and all we're going to have for lunch is tomato salad and bread and butter. If any one doesn't like it, they can leave it; I'm not going to spend any time fussing with special dishes this kind of weather."

Rosemary's practising that afternoon was interrupted several times by the telephone, twice for the wrong number. Aunt Trudy, with the air of a martyr, took her sewing out under the horse chestnut tree, Sarah and Shirley went to a neighbor's to play and Winnie announced that she intended to take a nap. So there was no

one to answer the bells except Rosemary. By the time she had jumped up to be asked "Is this the grocery store?" once or twice, had admitted the butcher boy with fresh meat which must be put on the ice and had been summoned three times by Aunt Trudy to thread her needle—for glasses, declared her aunt made her warmer in summer and she would not wear them—Rosemary's temper was fraying sadly.

"Rosemary," said Aunt Trudy, coming into the living room as the practise hour was about over (not allowing for time wasted, Rosemary told herself resentfully), "Rosemary, where is Sarah?"

"I don't care where she is!" cried Rosemary, whirling around on the piano bench. "I'm tired of always being asked where Sarah and Shirley are. I don't care!"

Aunt Trudy burst into tears.

"I don't think you ought to speak to me like that," she sobbed.

CHAPTER X

THE LAST STRAW

JACK WELLES' cheerful whistle sounded outside.

"Coming!" answered Rosemary.

She flung her arms about Aunt Trudy and gave her a penitent hug.

"I'm sorry I was cross, Auntie," she whispered. "You know I didn't mean it."

Then she sped out the front door and joined Jack who was waiting on the walk outside the hedge.

"Come on uptown and have a soda," he suggested. "Perhaps it will cool you off—you look slightly wild."

"I feel wild," admitted Rosemary, falling into step beside him. "This has been the most dreadful day!"

"Weather's enough to make anyone cross," said the boy quickly. "I'll bet the trouble is you're doing everyone's work. Hugh ought to make Sarah stir around. She's lazy."

"No, I don't think she is lazy," protested Rosemary, "Only, well you know Jack, it was more fun doing the things you have to do when Mother was home. I can't explain it very well, but I remember last summer Sarah thought she'd wash the upstairs windows to surprise Mother—Winnie was sick and Mother happened to say she didn't know when in the world the windows would get cleaned. Sarah heard her and the next day she lugged up a pail of water and a cloth and tried to wash them. She splashed water all over the wall paper and made an awful mess of it, but Mother kissed her and praised her and said she was glad she had such a helpful little daughter. Aunt Trudy isn't like that and Sarah likes to be praised for what she does. Aunt Trudy never tells her she makes a bed well, but if there is a wrinkle in the spread she shows her that. Sarah made the beds all right for a long time, but now she goes off mornings and plays."

"I knew it," nodded Jack, "and Winnie has a list of troubles a mile long waiting for you every night."

"Morning," corrected Rosemary, laughing. "Oh, Jack how do you know so much? I don't see how I could get along without you, because you're the only one who listens to my troubles.

Hugh is a dear, but he is so busy, and we're forbidden to write anything that will bother Mother."

"Fire into me any time you feel like it," invited Jack, steering her toward the drug-store steps and the soda fountain therein. "I'm always ready to listen and if you want any punching done, just let me know."

But the next hard day, when everything seemed to go wrong from breakfast time to the dinner hour, no Jack was at hand to listen to Rosemary's recital. He had gone away for a week's fishing trip with his father.

The day started with a pitched battle between Winnie and Sarah after breakfast, over the question of feeding the cat the top of the milk. Sarah declared passionately that she would starve herself before she would feed a defenseless cat skimmed milk and Winnie, with equal fervor, had announced that when she saw herself handing over the top milk to a cat they might send her to the insane asylum without delay.

"You're a mean, hateful woman!" shouted Sarah, rushing out of the kitchen and shutting the door on Shirley's finger which was too near the crack.

Shirley screamed with pain and after Rosemary

had bathed the poor bruised finger and Winnie had comforted the child with a cookie, Aunt Trudy declared that her nerves were too unstrung to spend the day in such a house and that she would go to town and shop.

"That means I'll have to answer the telephone while I'm practising," grumbled Rosemary. "Oh, dear, how selfish everyone is! I've a good mind to sit down and read on the porch while it is shady. All the others do as they please and I will, too."

Her book was interesting, and there was a blessed freedom from interruptions. Rosemary was amazed when Sarah, warm and dirty from grubbing in the rabbit house appeared at the foot of the steps and demanded to know if lunch was ready.

"Oh well, I'll make the beds and pick up after lunch," said Rosemary to herself.

Shirley assumed the airs of an invalid at the lunch table and secured large portions of meat and dessert as a concession to her hurt finger. She ignored the vegetables entirely though the meal was supposed to be her dinner and Doctor Hugh had given orders that she was to be fed after certain rules.

Winnie was put out because the iceman was

late and her dinner supplies threatened to spoil and Sarah insisted on the hot-water heater being lit so that she might have hot water in which to wash her cat. The wrangle with Winnie over this continued throughout the meal.

"I don't care whether you wash the cat or not," said Rosemary, when Sarah followed her to the corner of the living-room where the piano stood. "I'm going to practise, and don't bother me."

"Silly old music," grumbled Sarah, "come on, Shirley, let's go sail boats in the bath-tub."

Rosemary spent the afternoon at the piano, having promised herself that she would put in a full two hours over her music. The numerous interruptions spun out the time so that when she finally closed the lid the little clock on the mantelpiece chimed five.

"Good gracious, the beds aren't made!" thought Rosemary and flew up the stairs.

One glance into the bathroom halted her and cooled her energy. Shirley and Sarah had spent a busy afternoon, sailing boats in the tub. They had used every clean towel in sight to mop up the puddles on the floor and they were wet to their chins. Rosemary hustled them off to get into clean dry clothes and then worked feverishly

to restore the room to a semblance of order. Aunt Trudy came home before she had finished and when she saw the unmade beds and the morning's disorder still untouched, she spoke her mind in no uncertain terms.

"Everybody has a grouch," observed Sarah cheerfully when they sat down to dinner. Doctor Hugh had not come in.

"Don't use that word, Sarah," reproved her aunt, sugaring a bowl of boiled rice for Shirley.

"Don't want rice, want cutylet," said Shirley, pointing to the veal cutlet.

"She's had enough meat to-day," interposed Winnie. "The doctor says she shouldn't have it at all at night."

Shirley refused to touch the rice and was sitting in stately aloofness when Doctor Hugh came in looking warm and tired.

"What's the matter?" he asked, dropping into his chair and testing the soup Winnie instantly placed before him. Hugh was her idol and she always managed not to keep him waiting. "Heat too much for you?" he added.

"Grouches is what ails 'em," volunteered Sarah.

"I've asked her not to use that word, but no one pays any attention to my wishes," sighed Aunt Trudy.

"All right, drop it, Sarah," said Doctor Hugh shortly. "Aren't you eating to-night, sweetheart?" he asked Shirley.

"I want some cutylet," said Shirley wistfully. "I don't like rice."

"She ate nothing for her dinner but beef loaf and two helps of date pudding," announced Winnie. "I don't know when she expects to learn to to eat sensible and like a Christian."

"Well, if Rosemary would take a little interest in the child and coax her, she would soon learn to like vegetables," said Aunt Trudy. "I think Shirley is left too much to herself."

Rosemary flushed, but her brother spoke before she could reply.

"You eat your rice, Shirley, or not one other thing can you have to-night," he announced, with unusual severity, for Shirley was his pet. "No, crying won't do you any good—eat your rice and stop whining."

"I think you ought to know how things go when I'm not here, Hugh," began Aunt Trudy while Shirley ate her rice sulkily. "I was so upset this morning that I thought I should fly if I stayed in the house, so I went up to the city and shopped. I came in about half past five and not one bed was made! The children's clothes

lay just where they had flung them last night. That's a nice way, isn't it? Apparently I can not leave home for a few hours without finding everything shirked on my return."

Rosemary's blue eyes blazed with quick anger and an unlovely look came into her face.

"I don't care if I didn't make the beds!" she cried hotly. "I'm sick and tired of beds and dusting and answering the telephone. You never expect anyone in this house to do a single thing, but me!"

"Rosemary!" said Doctor Hugh.

"I don't think you should speak to me like that," asserted Aunt Trudy on the verge of tears.

"I won't speak to you at all!" jerked Rosemary. "That's the only way to please you."

Aunt Trudy began to cry and Doctor Hugh pushed back his plate.

"Please leave the table, Rosemary," he said distinctly. "Go into the office and wait for me."

Rosemary rushed from the table like a whirlwind and the house shook as she banged the office door.

"I don't care!" she raged, in the depths of the comfortable shabby arm-chair that had been her father's. "I don't care! Aunt Trudy al-

ways cries and it isn't fair. I suppose Hugh will be furious, but let him. I'm so tired and so hot and so miserable—" and Rosemary gave herself up to a passion of angry tears.

She had been crying in the dark and when the door opened and someone switched on the light she knew it was Doctor Hugh. She slipped down from the chair and walked around back of the desk. He took the swivel chair and glanced at her half-averted face gravely.

"Rosemary," he said gently, "how would you like to ride over to Bennington with me to-morrow? They're opening the new hospital and I half promised to go. We'll be gone all the morning and it will make a little change for you."

Bennington was the county seat, twenty miles away. It should be delightful not to have anything to do the next morning but put on a clean frock and go with Hugh. He might even let her drive the car a few minutes at a time on a straight stretch of road— Rosemary found her tongue.

"Oh, Hugh, I'd love it!" she said enthusiastically.

"All right, so should I," he smiled. "I think you need a bit of pleasure. Things going rather hard for you, dear?"

Rosemary nodded, a lump in her throat surprising her. She had expected Hugh to be angry and to scold. Instead he was very gentle.

"I'm sorry," he said, "Very sorry. You miss Mother, I know; we all do. But I think you are learning a good deal this summer without her. I've been watching you, and you are more self-reliant and capable every day. Several people have spoken to me about the way you answer the 'phone and the intelligent answers you give them. I don't know what I should do without you."

Rosemary flushed with pleasure. Then, being Rosemary, she flung herself headlong at her brother, narrowly missing his glasses.

"Oh, Hugh! Hugh dear, I *am* sorry I acted so to-night!" she wept.

"There, there," he patted her gently. "You didn't mean to be cross, we all know that. You were tired and so was Aunt Trudy. I guess this heat has about worn everybody out. I tried to warn you, but the fireworks had to blaze up. Now kiss me, like my sweet girl, for I'm going out again, and then make your peace with Aunt Trudy. And to-morrow morning we'll leave dull care behind us and enjoy ourselves for a few hours."

"Shirley would love to go," suggested Rosemary.

"All right, I thought you ought to leave the cares behind, but we'll take Shirley if you say so," was the answer.

CHAPTER XI

A CHAIN OF PROMISES

THE "hot spell" broke that night and the morning was deliciously cool and fresh. This delightful state of weather continued for several days and was immediately reflected in the changed temper of the Willis household and, it is safe to say, in many other East-shore households since we are all more or less affected by weather conditions.

Aunt Trudy, who really was miserable under excessive heat revived and insisted on giving a birthday party for Shirley who was six years old on the third of August, and Rosemary and Sarah pleased and touched the good lady by their assurances that it was the nicest child's party ever given in the town. Shirley took her good fortune complacently and was heard to remark that she wished school would open the next day because now she was old enough to go.

The day after the party Aunt Trudy decided

to "run into the city" for her new glasses and some special errands. She left soon after breakfast and would, she informed Winnie, return on the 5:48 train that afternoon.

It was the day for Rosemary's music lesson and she went, at two o'clock, to her teacher's house. The lesson over, she took a book back to the Library for Aunt Trudy, bought some clothespins for Winnie and meeting Jack Welles, brown and freckled from his fishing trip, accepted his invitation to stop at the hardware store and see the prize trout his father had caught and which was mounted and on exhibition in the window. So it was nearly half past four when she reached home.

"Rosemary!" a shrill whisper came down to her over the bannisters, as she went upstairs to leave the book she had selected for Aunt Trudy on the table in her room. "Rosemary, come up here, quick!"

Rosemary, vaguely frightened, ran up to Sarah's room. Shirley was there and both little girls looked as though they had been crying.

"What's the matter—did Shirley hurt herself?" asked Rosemary in alarm.

Sarah shut the door and looked at her older sister queerly.

"Promise you won't tell? Cross-your-heart-hope-to-die?" she urged.

Rosemary sat down on the bed.

"Is it good or bad?" she asked cautiously.

"Bad!" cried Shirley in an awe-struck tone. "Awfully bad. Isn't it, Sarah?"

Sarah nodded hopelessly.

"It's so bad," she declared, "that you never heard anything as bad. And if you tell, Rosemary, I'll run away, as far off as I can run away, and never, never come back."

Sarah's dark eyes were red-rimmed and she seemed so desperately unhappy that Rosemary's kind heart was touched.

"Oh, Sarah darling, you know I won't tell!" she exclaimed. "I don't care what it is, I won't tell anyone. I promise."

Sarah drew a long breath of relief. She sat down on the floor, her favorite resting place, and Shirley scrambled down beside her.

"Well then," said Sarah more calmly, "I've lost Aunt Trudy's turquoise ring!"

"You've lost Aunt Trudy's turquoise ring!" repeated Rosemary. "How on earth could you lose her ring?"

"We were playing with the jewel case," mur-

mured Sarah, a dark red flush rising under her brown skin.

"Sarah Eaton Willis! And after what Hugh told you!" Rosemary stared at the culprit in astonishment.

For Aunt Trudy's jewel case, containing numerous rings and pins of no inconsiderable value and for which she cared little beyond the pleasure of possession seldom, if ever, wearing any of the pieces, had delighted Sarah and Shirley from the first moment they discovered it. Their aunt had indulgently allowed them to deck themselves out and play "lady" and apparently the idea that anything could happen to a valuable brooch or ring or a string of pearls, or cut amber beads be lost, never occurred to her. It occurred to Doctor Hugh, however, when he came home unexpectedly one afternoon and met Sarah and Shirley arrayed in barbaric splendor. He had immediately forbidden further play with the jewelry and, at his orders, Aunt Trudy had placed the case among the list of things on her dresser which must not be touched.

"I didn't think Aunt Trudy would care if we played with her rings a little while this afternoon," said Sarah uneasily, "we were going to

put everything back, weren't we, Shirley? I had the ring on and Winnie called me to go get a cake of yeast—she's always wanting me to run errands. And when I came back the ring was gone off my finger and we hunted everywhere and we couldn't find it. So it must be lost," wound up the small sinner.

"I don't believe you have half looked," protested Rosemary. "Where did you go after you bought the yeast cake? Straight home? Well, I'll go look all the way to the store and back, and you and Shirley look everywhere in the house you can think of."

"You won't tell, will you, Rosemary?" coaxed Sarah. "Hugh will be so mad, but Aunt Trudy won't mind. She never wears any of her rings."

"Of course I won't tell," said Rosemary impatiently. "I promised. But you hurry and put the rest of the things back in the case and put it on Aunt Trudy's dresser, Sarah. And then look all over the house."

Rosemary searched every step of the way to the grocery store where Sarah had gone to buy the yeast cake, and all the way back, but with no result. The two little girls reported that they had looked "everywhere" in the house, but no ring had obligingly turned up. Aunt Trudy

came home, apparently saw nothing wrong with the orderly array of articles on her dresser, and dinner was a comfortable meal if three of the five present were a little more silent than usual.

That night, when they were getting ready for bed, Rosemary announced that she had a plan. She had offered to go to bed when Sarah went and the surprised and pleased Aunt Trudy had told Doctor Hugh that she was sure the girls were learning to like an early bedtime hour.

"If the ring is lost, it is lost, and that is all there is to it," said Rosemary, sitting on Sarah's bed to brush her hair, a habit she still clung to though the bobbed locks were quickly made ready for the night. "And there is only one thing to do, that I can see: buy Aunt Trudy another."

"Buy her a ring!" gasped Sarah. "We can't —we haven't any money. And Hugh won't give it to us, unless we tell him what it's for. How much does a turquoise ring cost, Rosemary?"

"I don't know," admitted Rosemary. "A great deal, I suppose. I'll have to earn it, because I am the oldest. And Sarah you'll have to let me tell Jack Welles, because I want to ask him how I can earn some money."

"Aunt Trudy won't know the ring is lost," argued Sarah. "She never looks at 'em—she says she doesn't."

"That has nothing to do with it," replied Rosemary earnestly. "When you lose a thing, you try to replace it—that's what Mother says. Do you care if I tell Jack, Sarah?"

"No, but he mustn't tell Hugh," Sarah insisted.

The next morning Rosemary seized an opportunity while Jack was trimming the dividing hedge, to confide the story of the lost ring, first swearing him to secrecy.

"And now you have to tell me how I can earn money to buy Aunt Trudy another ring," she said anxiously.

Jack whistled in perplexity.

"I think you ought to tell Hugh," he said at once. "A ring like that must cost a lot—Aunt Trudy wouldn't have any make-believe stones. You can't earn money without he finds it out and then there will be a pretty row. Hasn't Sarah enough backbone to face the music?"

"Well, you see if she had only played with the jewel case after Hugh told her not to, that would be bad enough," explained Rosemary. "But she played with it and lost a ring and Hugh will

scold dreadfully if he finds that out. I promised not to tell and so did you, Jack."

"Yes, I did, and I'm sorry I ever made such a fool promise," said Jack crossly. "I don't see how you can earn any money, Rosemary. There is nothing for you to do."

Rosemary was sure she could think of something and that afternoon she hailed Jack triumphantly.

"I've got it!" she called, running down to the hedge where he was raking out the trimmings left from the morning's work. "I know what I can do, Jack. I heard Mrs. Dunning tell Aunt Trudy the other day that she would give anything if she could get someone to stay with her baby while she went to the card club meetings Tuesday afternoons. I can take care of the baby!"

"What do you know about taking care of people's babies?" demanded Jack with scorn.

"I know how, if they are not very little ones," Rosemary assured him. "The Dunning baby is old enough to walk. I am going to get a baby to take care of every afternoon and that will be a whole lot of money every week!"

"What will Aunt Trudy say?" asked Jack pointedly.

"She won't know—she takes a nap half the afternoon, and I'll ask the babies' mothers to keep it a secret," planned Rosemary. "I won't say I am going to surprise Aunt Trudy with a present, but they'll think I am saving up for her birthday or something, perhaps."

"You see, you've started to deceive folks already," argued Jack, "and you know if Hugh ever finds out what you are doing he will be raging. Hadn't you better tell him, Rosemary, or get Sarah to own up?"

"She won't—I did try," admitted Rosemary. "Sarah is scared to death of what Hugh will say. No, I have to get another ring for Aunt Trudy and then, maybe, we can let her know the old one is lost."

In spite of Jack's opposition, Rosemary persisted in carrying out her plan for earning money. As she had said, she had nearly the whole of every afternoon to herself for Aunt Trudy took a long nap and Doctor Hugh rarely came home between one and six. She called on the mothers of young babies and in many instances was eagerly welcomed. A great many women wanted to leave their youngsters with some one for an hour or two in the afternoon and Rosemary had a "natural way" with children,

to quote Winnie. The babies took to her at first sight and in a few days Rosemary was able to announce to the disgruntled Jack that she had "work" for every afternoon in the week.

"They think I'm earning money for Christmas," she said, "I didn't say that, honestly I didn't, Jack. But whenever I told any one I wanted to earn some money and did they want me to take care of their baby for fifteen cents an hour, they always said, 'Oh, I suppose you want to earn some money for Christmas, before school opens' !"

"Bet you'll give it up after the first day," prophesied Jack. "Taking care of cranky babies isn't what it is cracked up to be."

There were many afternoons when Rosemary recalled his words. She would have liked to give up, often. The babies were as good and sweet-tempered as babies usually are, but no child is angelic and the hot weather and their teeth troubles fretted the small people sadly. Rosemary was sometimes at her wits' end to keep her charges amused and there were days when she longed to fly home and rest her tired head on the cool pillow on her own little bed. She had never been forced to do anything steadily for long after she tired of it, and to be obliged to smile and play

with a wailing, discontented baby on a hot, muggy afternoon did seem more than she could stand. But she had plenty of perseverance, had Rosemary, and when she once made up her mind to do a thing she stuck it out. Sarah and Shirley had ceased to worry about the ring. Rosemary would make it all right again for them—of that they had no doubt.

But if Aunt Trudy slept long hours and did not interfere with the goings and comings of her young nieces, she was not quite so unobservant as they sometimes thought.

"It seems to me that Rosemary is out of the house a good deal," she remarked one morning to Winnie. "She ought to take more of an interest in things here at the house."

"Well, I suppose it's only natural she should find a good deal to do outside," answered Winnie, who had not been blind to Rosemary's frequent absences, cautiously. "She's young, you know, and doing your duty gets tiresome after a bit."

But to herself, Winnie admitted that Rosemary seemed to have absolved herself from any responsibility toward her sisters. "Left them to shift for themselves," was the way Winnie put it. She was puzzled and also disappointed in her

favorite, for indifference of any kind had never been a Rosemary trait.

"She ought to be looking after Sarah and Shirley some of the time," grumbled Winnie. "Those young ones are under my feet continually. The least Rosemary can do is to read to 'em now and then to keep them quiet."

That very afternoon Miss Mason, Rosemary's music teacher called to see Aunt Trudy. Rosemary's music was falling below its usual standard and that was a pity. Was she practising as faithfully as usual?

"I think it is a shame to waste all that money on music lessons, if you won't practise, Rosemary," announced her aunt at the dinner table that night.

CHAPTER XII

ONE DISASTROUS AFTERNOON

"I DO practise," said Rosemary desperately.

"Well not enough, or Miss Mason wouldn't say your work was falling below your usual standard," Aunt Trudy insisted. "She was here this afternoon, Hugh, and she asked me whether Rosemary was giving as much time as usual to the piano."

"Oh, let her slow up this kind of weather, if she wants to," responded the doctor lazily. "I think she's stuck pretty faithfully to the scales and finger exercises myself."

Rosemary flashed him a grateful look.

"Of course I don't want to find fault," said Aunt Trudy to this, "but you know I feel responsible. And Winnie was saying this morning that Sarah and Shirley are left too much to themselves."

"Oh, that's all right," declared Sarah hastily and Shirley echoed, "Yes, that's all right."

Doctor Hugh laughed and even Rosemary

smiled faintly. How could she explain that she had no time left from the babies in the afternoon to spend with the little sisters, or that the reason her music was showing neglect was because her morning practise hours were given over to the odds and ends of duties she dared not leave undone for fear of comment and question and now had no other time to do?

"I imagine Sarah and Shirley amuse themselves," said the doctor, smiling, "but Rosemary dear, I don't want you to get in the habit of being out of the house too much. Three afternoons I've called you up and you weren't home."

Doctor Hugh wondered if Nina Edmonds was absorbing Rosemary's attention again, but he thought it wiser not to ask. As a matter of fact, had he but known it, the voluble Nina had been away at the seashore for several weeks.

"Well, all I can say," remarked Aunt Trudy after a pause, "is that I hope, Rosemary, your sense of duty will be strong enough to cause you to pay a little attention to the children while I am away. I am going to-morrow morning to spend two days with my cousin, you know, Hugh. She is sailing for London, Wednesday."

"Yes, you told me," acknowledged the doctor.

"We'll manage all right, Aunt Trudy. Rosemary will keep us all in order."

But in spite of his cheerful faith, Aunt Trudy departed the next morning "worried to death" as she confided to Winnie.

"I have a feeling that Sarah and Shirley will get into some mischief, the minute my back is turned," declared the good lady. "And Rosemary will be mooning around and not catch them until it is too late."

Aunt Trudy's doleful prediction proved only too true. That very afternoon, when Rosemary left to take care of the Simmons baby while his proud mother attended the fortnightly meeting of her card club, Sarah and Shirley decided to sail boats in the bath-tub. Unfortunately, when the tub was half filled, Ray Anderson called them to come and see his new kiddie car and when that was duly inspected, Sarah pressed Shirley into service to help her feed the rabbits.

"Let's go up to the store and buy 'em some fresh carrots," Sarah suggested. "I'll get the money out of the tin bank—Rosemary won't mind, 'cause I'll pay her back soon as I can."

Rosemary was putting the money she earned into the little tin chimney bank which stood on

the mantel shelf in her room. She called it the "ring fund" and to Sarah it seemed that there must be money enough already in it to buy several rings. But Rosemary was positive she still needed a great deal more.

Sarah and Shirley, by dint of much shaking and banging the bank against the shelf edge, succeeded in extracting ten cents and with this they purchased fresh young carrots, a delicacy much beloved by the pampered rabbits. They had fed the rabbits and were swinging in the porch swing, when they heard a cry from Winnie.

"For mercy's sake, where is the water coming from!" she shrieked. "Look at it, leaking down through the ceiling and dripping on my clean table-cloth—have the pipes sprung a leak?"

She dashed madly upstairs, Sarah and Shirley at her heels. The bath-tub was overflowing and the floor was a lake.

"Don't ever let me hear of you sailing boats again, as long as I live in this house!" Winnie scolded, as she rolled up her sleeves and pulled out the plug. "Sarah, go down and get me the mop—quick! It'll be a wonder if the plaster doesn't fall in the dining-room, it's that soaked!"

Dinner was delayed because of the catastrophe and when Doctor Hugh came in, hungry

and tired, it was to find Winnie spreading a fresh cloth on the table and scolding Rosemary vigorously.

"The time to be helping me is before such a thing happens," announced Winnie, twitching the linen angrily. "Is that you, Hughie? Heaven alone knows when dinner will be ready to-night—I've been made to set the table twice over and the potatoes boiled dry while I was mopping up the bath-room."

In a few words she sketched the incident.

"Rosemary, can't you look after the children a little better, just till your aunt gets back?" asked the doctor wearily. "Where were you when they were letting the water run?"

"I was—out," said Rosemary lamely. "Just around," she added hastily, seeing a question forming on his lips.

"Well you'll have to stay in to-morrow," he said decisively. "Aunt Trudy will be home to-morrow night, and I want you to be with Sarah and Shirley till then. That isn't asking too much—one day. And we'll see if we can get along without any more accidents. No éclairs to-night, Winnie, for Shirley and Sarah."

The two culprits, deprived of dessert, were excused early, but Rosemary left alone with

Hugh was too busy with her own thoughts to talk much though ordinarily she loved an opportunity for a chat with him.

"I simply have to go to Mrs. Hepburn's tomorrow," she thought panic-stricken. "I promised faithfully to come, rain or shine. She is going somewhere with her husband and that's the only day he has off. I'll have to go—that is all there is about it. If Hugh finds it out, he will be furious, but perhaps he won't know. Anyway, I'm going! I promised."

Sarah and Shirley playing their favorite game of dominoes on the porch after dinner, were startled by a sudden rush from Rosemary. She whirled through the doorway and demanded of her sister, "Sarah, have you been meddling with my tin bank?"

Sarah got up from the floor slowly.

"I borrowed ten cents," she admitted, trying to back away and backing into a rocking chair.

"You 'borrowed' ten cents!" cried Rosemary, advancing upon her. "And you know I want to save every cent! Of all the selfish, mean girls I ever knew, you're the worst!"

She clutched the unhappy Sarah by her broad sailor collar and proceeded to shake her fiercely. Sarah retaliated by kicking viciously and they

were in eminent danger of upsetting the wicker table and porch lamp when Doctor Hugh strode out and separated them.

"Rosemary!" he said in surprise. "What do you call it you are doing? And Sarah, too—kicking and fighting like two small boys! What ails you, anyway?"

"She took ten cents out of my bank—it's just the same as stealing, because she never pays back anything she borrows," panted Rosemary, almost crying. "I found a penny on the floor where she dropped it. And she knows how hard I'm trying to save every cent, too."

"Well, Sarah, I think robbing a bank is a pretty mean trick," pronounced Doctor Hugh judiciously. "Where is this bank, Rosemary? I've never seen it. Seems to me you're beginning to get ready for Christmas rather far in advance."

Rosemary looked at Sarah who gazed at her imploringly. Both girls had forgotten for the moment the ring fund and its object.

"I'll pay you back to-morrow Rosemary, honestly I will," said Sarah hurriedly. "Aunt Trudy owes me ten cents for not melting her letter sealing wax. She will pay me to-morrow night and I'll give it to you."

"Sarah, Sarah," groaned her brother, half in amusement, half in despair, "I'm afraid your ethics are pretty wobbly. So Aunt Trudy has to bribe you, does she, to let her desk alone? Well, see that you turn the bribe over to Rosemary, though I should call it robbing Peter to pay Paul, with a vengeance."

"Goodness, suppose he had made you tell why you were saving the money!" whispered Sarah, when the doctor had gone back to his office. "I was just shaking in my shoes."

"Sarah, wouldn't you rather tell, anyway?" said Rosemary suddenly. "I don't believe Hugh would be so very cross, because you didn't mean to lose the ring. And I am afraid it will take me a perfect age to earn enough money to buy another."

"I won't tell, ever!" declared Sarah, shaking her dark head obstinately. "And if you tell, Rosemary Willis, I'll never speak to you as long as I live! You don't have to buy another ring —that's silly. Aunt Trudy doesn't even know this one is lost."

"I don't care if she doesn't," insisted Rosemary. "You lost it, and we have to get another one for her; that's all there is to it."

The next afternoon Doctor Hugh repeated his request that Rosemary should stay with Sarah and Shirley till Aunt Trudy came home on the 5:46 train. Then he left on a long round of calls and Rosemary, not without many regrets and a thrill of fear when she thought what her brother would say if he found her out, sped up the street to the pleasant house where Mrs. Hepburn, hatted and gloved eagerly waited her coming.

"I was so afraid you wouldn't come," she greeted the little girl. "Baby is asleep, and I want to get away before he wakes up and sees me go. I'll be back at half-past five, sharp, but of course you won't go till I come. You mustn't leave Baby alone in the house."

As luck would have it, Aunt Trudy decided to come home on an earlier train and found herself in the midst of bundle-laden Eastshore shoppers who had spent the day in the city and were returning with their spoils. Motherly Mrs. Dunning occupied a seat with Aunt Trudy and what more natural than that she should speak of how much help Rosemary had been to her that summer? The wonder was that Aunt Trudy had so long escaped hearing but she went about

very little in the town and had met comparatively few of the neighbors even those living on her own street.

"Yes indeed I've been able to go away an afternoon or two a week," babbled Mrs. Dunning, "something I haven't done since Baby came. Your niece is such a nice child and so reliable. I wanted her this afternoon, but Mrs. Hepburn had engaged her first."

"My niece? Mrs. Hepburn engaged her?" repeated Aunt Trudy faintly.

Mrs. Dunning explained and Aunt Trudy managed to keep from fainting though as she told Doctor Hugh afterward, she would never know how the strength was given her. She looked nearer to apoplexy than fainting when she walked into the house a half hour later and, purple-faced and choking, demanded to be told the instant the doctor came in.

Doctor Hugh and his car rolled up a few moments later and Aunt Trudy sobbed out the "miserable story" as she characterized it.

"To think of Rosemary, acting as a nursemaid, and we never knew it!" she wailed. "What would her mother say? What must the neighbors think?"

"Bother the neighbors!" said Doctor Hugh

testily. "When Rosemary comes home tell her I want to see her."

Though his aunt did not suspect it, he had seldom been as angry in his life. Not only had Rosemary deliberately defied him and gone off that afternoon, but she had most certainly furnished topic for gossip in Eastshore for it was not possible in so small a town that her occupation had been unnoticed. And Doctor Hugh was very proud of his pretty sister. What could have possessed the child to do such a wild thing?

He had himself in hand by the time Rosemary came running in, late, for Mrs. Hepburn had been delayed and nothing could have induced the young worker to desert her charge.

"Your brother wants you—he's in the office," said Aunt Trudy stiffly.

And as soon as she saw Hugh the most awful sinking sensation went through Rosemary. He had found out, how, she could not guess, but somehow, that was plain.

CHAPTER XIII

JACK STRAIGHTENS THINGS OUT

"YOU—you wanted to see me Hugh?" Rosemary faltered.

"Please come in and close the door," he said quietly. Then as she obeyed, "Now what is this Mrs. Dunning has been telling Aunt Trudy, Rosemary? Have you been taking care of babies in the neighborhood for fifteen cents an hour?"

Rosemary nodded.

"How long has this been going on?" asked her brother.

"A—a couple of weeks," answered Rosemary faintly.

"What was the idea?"

Rosemary said nothing.

"I asked you a question, Rosemary. Please answer me. What made you do a thing like this without consulting some one? Did Winnie know?"

"No," said Rosemary reluctantly, "Winnie didn't know. No one did. I wanted to earn some money, Hugh."

Then came the question she had been dreading.

"What for?"

Rosemary nervously knotted and unknotted her handkerchief. Her blue eyes roved around the familiar room and came back to the grim face and the dark eyes which watched her relentlessly.

"Oh, Hugh!" she cried desperately, "PLEASE"!

Her brother picked up a paper weight and studied it intently.

"Look here, Rosemary," he began more gently, "you deliberately disobeyed this afternoon when I asked you to stay in the house—"

"Because I had absolutely promised Mrs. Hepburn, Hugh," Rosemary broke in eagerly. "I'd *promised!* She was depending on me and I had to go."

"Very well, a promise is a promise," admitted the doctor, "though when wrongly given sometimes they must be broken. We'll set aside the fact that you disobeyed and consider only this wild scheme apparently undertaken because you wanted to earn money. I want you to tell me

why you thought you needed money and why you couldn't come to me and ask for it."

"Because," whispered Rosemary unhappily, "Because."

"That's no reason," said the doctor brusquely. "Come, 'fess up, Rosemary, and I'll help you out of the scrape, whatever it is. My dear little girl, you can't go around among the neighbors like this—families help each other and stand by each other. I don't care a hoot what other people may think—as Aunt Trudy seems to believe I should—but I care a great deal that my little sister should go to outsiders instead of coming to me."

Rosemary touched his sleeve timidly. She longed to throw herself in his arms, cry that she was tired of taking care of silly, uninteresting babies (though as a matter of fact when she wasn't tired she loved them all, the cross as well as the good-natured ones), and tell him the whole story about the lost ring. But there was her promise to Sarah. A promise was a promise—Hugh himself had said so. And families were to stand by each other, and she must stand by Sarah and Shirley.

"I can't tell you, Hugh," said Rosemary earnestly. "I just can't."

"You mean you won't," said the doctor sternly. "Well, go up and bring me down this bank—I suppose that was the one you and Sarah were quarreling over the other night? And you put the money you earned in that? I thought so; bring it down to me."

Wondering what he meant to do, Rosemary went up to her room and returned with the bank. Doctor Hugh dropped it into one of the lower drawers of his desk and turned the key.

"I want you to bring me a list of the women for whom you have taken care of children," he said, pushing a block of paper and a pencil toward Rosemary, "and, as nearly as you can remember, the number of hours you worked for each. Then we'll count out this money and you will have to return it. I want that list by to-morrow night."

Winnie sounded the dinner gong just then and Rosemary went silently to the table. Aunt Trudy's eyes were red from crying and Sarah and Shirley looked frightened. Their aunt had told them the "awful thing" Rosemary had been doing and Sarah was in terror lest Hugh already knew her part in it. But dinner, uncomfortable meal as it was, reassured Sarah. Hugh would

not have allowed her to leave the table without a word if he had known about the ring.

Rosemary went to her room directly after dinner and Sarah and Shirley followed.

"Was he mad?" asked Shirley, her eyes round with excitement.

"Aunt Trudy was crying and wringing her hands," volunteered Sarah. "She says the family is disgraced and Hugh will be ashamed to show his face in Eastshore."

"What a silly thing to say!" cried Rosemary. "Thank goodness, Hugh is no snob. But he is furious because I can't tell him why I wanted the money. And, oh, girls, I have to take it all back. How can I ever buy the ring now, and what will the people say when I bring back the money they paid me?"

She hurriedly outlined what Doctor Hugh had said, and Sarah immediately suggested that they get hold of the bank and bury it.

"Hugh would only punish us again," said Rosemary practically. "Let's tell him about the ring, Sarah. He said he'd help me out of the scrape, no matter what it was, if I'd tell him."

But Sarah set her chin obstinately and refused to go to her brother. She reminded Rosemary

of her promise and Shirley, too, began to cry and say that she was afraid of Hugh. So it ended by Rosemary renewing her promise not to tell and then crying herself to sleep because she remembered how patient Hugh had been and she knew she had both hurt and disappointed him.

"And I can't go around and give the money back," she wept, tossing about on her wet pillow, "What will people think? But Hugh will make me, if he goes along to see me do it. Oh, dear, the Willis will makes all the trouble in this family!"

But in the morning the Willis will helped Rosemary to remain unshaken in her determination not to tell any more than she had told. Doctor Hugh called her into the office before breakfast—he had had his early and was ready to leave when the girls came down stairs—and asked her again why she wanted the money, patiently at first and then, as Rosemary stubbornly refused to give a reason, he lost his temper and began to storm. Rosemary finally flew out of the office and banged the door and the morning was unhappily begun.

Winnie, who had heard the story from Aunt Trudy, thought it her duty to lecture Rosemary

during breakfast—at which Aunt Trudy did not appear—and Rosemary, whose nerves were already strained to the breaking point, answered snappishly.

"I should think you'd be ashamed to speak to me like that before your little sisters," said Winnie indignantly. "Shirley wouldn't talk to Winnie like that, would you dear?"

"Oh, my no," said Shirley angelically.

This was too much for Rosemary. She fled from the table to indulge in a good cry up in her mother's room. Doctor Hugh had trusted the key to her, after he had locked the room and Rosemary sometimes went there when she wanted to be quiet and think. The room was in perfect order, sweet and clean and well-aired and the things on the dresser and shelves were exactly as her mother usually kept them. Rosemary had arranged them so because she thought her mother would like to find them ready for her when she came home.

After the tears had stopped, Rosemary sat quietly for a few minutes in the little low white rocker. Something of the peace and stillness of the room stole into her troubled mind. Presently she rose and went out, locking the door carefully behind her.

"Anything the matter, Rosemary—you look a little woozy," said Jack Welles with neighborly frankness, seeing her across the hedge later that morning as she was spreading out handkerchiefs to bleach for Winnie.

In a rush of words, Rosemary told him the "matter."

"Well, you do have a merry time," Jack commented when she had finished. "But the solution is simple after all."

"I can't take back that money," said Rosemary miserably. "But what can I do? Hugh will never give in."

"Do? There's nothing for you to do," answered Jack vigorously. "Sarah and Shirley have the next act on the program and it's up to me to see that they realize it, if you can't show them their duty. Where's Sarah now?"

"Teaching the cat to sit up," said Rosemary without interest. "It won't do you any good to argue with her, Jack. She's afraid of Hugh and she won't ever tell him. Besides, you know, I only told you if you would promise not to tell."

"Oh, I haven't forgotten that you nailed me firmly before you would say a word," Jack replied grimly. "But I still think I can persuade Sarah to confess her share and if she will, Shir-

ley will admit that she also was present. I'll go begin my good work now."

He was gone half an hour and when he came back he was smiling.

"Everything's all fixed," he announced. "Sarah and Shirley are going to march up to the guns like good soldiers to-night, and I'm going to do the talking for them. Sarah, sensibly enough, wants to get it over before dinner, so I've promised to come over right after lunch and sit on your porch so I'll be here no matter how early Hugh gets home. You and I have to bolster up the weak spots in their courage."

"I don't see how you ever persuaded Sarah," marveled Rosemary. "I argued and argued, and she wouldn't listen to me."

Jack looked very wise.

"I used moral suasion," he declared. "Told her if she didn't own up to-night, I'd go to Doctor Hugh and tell him everything myself."

"Is that moral suasion?" asked Rosemary doubtfully.

"Of course it is," said Jack with confidence. "If it isn't it ought to be. I've never broken a promise yet and I'm mighty glad Sarah didn't make me, but I'll be jiggered if I don't think

there are times when it is worse to keep a promise than to break it."

A promise "wrongly given"—Doctor Hugh's words came back to Rosemary. Had she given her promise wrongly?

Doctor Hugh did not come home till nearly five o'clock and the four solemn young people on the front porch were getting decidedly fidgety before his roadster appeared at the curb and he jumped out and hurried up the walk. He said "Hello" to the four as he passed them and he was surprised, therefore, when he turned from his desk to see them enter the office and advance toward him.

"Hugh," said Jack clearly, "I've something to tell you. Sarah really ought to, but she asked me to do it."

"Suppose you sit down," said the doctor gravely.

Sarah sat down gingerly on a chair near the door, ready for instant flight, and the others ranged themselves near the desk. Jack began with the loss of the ring and told everything that had happened since. He spoke rapidly, but without excitement, and he was not interrupted once.

"I am really to blame, as much as anyone," he

declared, when he had reached the point where Rosemary had confided in him about the missing ring and her determination to replace it. "I had no business to promise not to tell before I heard what I was not to tell. That's a fool stunt."

"Yes, I think it is," agreed Doctor Hugh, but smilingly.

"Rosemary thought she had to go on taking care of cranky babies till she could buy another ring. If I'd had any money of my own—and I don't know why I never do—" Jack paused for a moment to consider this new idea— "I would have bought a ring myself and helped her out of the hole."

Doctor Hugh listened silently to the remainder of the recital, his eyes studying the four expressive faces before him.

"So Rosemary really couldn't tell you what she wanted the money for, because she had promised," finished Jack. "And Sarah was afraid, and so was Shirley."

"I see," the doctor said. "I'm sorry they were afraid. Sarah dear, do you really think you have saved yourself anything by not telling me when you lost the ring?" he went on, turning to Sarah. "Haven't you had more trouble and worry and unhappiness trying to keep me from

finding out and don't you think it is better to own up right away and take your punishment and have it all over?"

"Yes," admitted Sarah in a very small voice.

"Well, then, next time tell me at once," said Doctor Hugh earnestly. "And don't ever let me hear of four of you making a chain of promises like this. We'll see what can be done about the ring to-morrow, Sarah, and you and I will talk it over with Aunt Trudy."

He held out his hand to Jack and put an arm around Rosemary, whose face was radiant with relief and happiness.

"I wish you had spoken up a little sooner, Jack," growled the doctor. "I find that keeping track of three girls isn't the easiest task in the world."

"But we won't lose any more rings," said the practical Sarah.

"No, we won't lose any more rings, Hugh," whispered Rosemary, standing on tiptoe to kiss him.

CHAPTER XIV

A NEW SCHOOL TERM

THE next morning, as soon as breakfast was over, the unwilling Sarah was called into conference in the office with her brother and Aunt Trudy. The latter was much surprised to learn that she had lost a ring, and insisted that Sarah, who was rather a favorite of hers, should not be punished.

"I never did care anything about the ring, Hugh," said Aunt Trudy earnestly, "and there's been trouble enough about it. It's just like Rosemary to want to buy me another, but I'd never wear it, so why should she? I'm glad enough that this ridiculous idea of hers has been stopped before it went on any longer. Don't, for pity's sake, say another word about that unfortunate ring."

"Well, Sarah, that let's you out," said Doctor Hugh cheerfully. "I must say I think you've shirked all the way through, first in not owning up and again in letting Rosemary take the re-

sponsibility of replacing the ring. And you kept her from telling me, simply to shield yourself. However, I really understand that you were afraid and fear often keeps us from doing what we know to be right. You're going to fight that little 'I'm-afraid' "—for he had had a brief talk with his little sister the night before after the others had left the office and felt that he was just beginning to understand Sarah—"and put him in his place, which is behind you, and so we'll start all over as long as Aunt Trudy is willing. Shall we?"

"Let's," said Sarah laconically, but she slipped a confiding small hand in the doctor's larger one. He squeezed it affectionately.

"Now I must be off," he said, glancing at his watch. "Where is Rosemary? I thought I'd take her with me this morning—the ride will do her good. Practising?" he repeated as Sarah called his attention to the sound of finger exercises. "Let her practise this afternoon—she needs to get away from a fixed schedule now and then."

Rosemary enjoyed this ride and the others that followed in quick succession. Doctor Hugh, unknown to her, was realizing that every one had been expecting too much of the oldest

daughter of the house, had looked to her, in fact, to grow up in one summer.

"Poor little kid!" thought the doctor one morning, as he allowed Rosemary to take the wheel of the car on a level stretch of clear road and the color came into her face from the excitement and delight. "Poor little kid, we've been expecting her to have the patience and wisdom and experience Mother has. She's only twelve years old and we ask her to act like a woman. She's bound to make mistakes, but she won't make the same one twice—I'll bank on that. Temper and will, rightly directed, make for strength, and Rosemary will be as lovely within some day as she is to the eye—and my sister is going to be a beauty, or I miss my guess."

Aloud he said, "Watch the road, Rosemary. Never mind what is behind you, watch the road ahead."

Coming in at noon from one of these rides with Doctor Hugh, Rosemary found a small box, wrapped in white tissue paper and tied with pink string, at her plate.

"It looks like a jeweler's box," she said jokingly as she opened it. "Why it is!" she added in surprise.

Sarah and Shirley crowded around her as she

opened it. A little gold "friendship" circle pin, set with a single turquoise, lay on a bed of blue cotton.

"How perfectly lovely!" cried Rosemary. "Is it mine?"

"Of course it is," said Sarah. "Jack and Shirley and I went to Mr. Evans and bought it for you. Do you like it?"

"Why it's darling," the enthusiastic Rosemary assured her. "I never saw a prettier pin. Look, Hugh, look Aunt Trudy," she said eagerly, holding out the pin to them as they came in from the hall.

"Why don't you ask where we got the money to buy it?" suggested Sarah and at that Doctor Hugh shouted with laughter.

"You'll be the death of me yet, Sarah," he protested. "Sit down, people, do, and we'll begin luncheon while Sarah reveals her dark secret."

" 'Tisn't a secret," announced Sarah with dignity. "Hugh said we might take the ring-fund money, Rosemary, and buy you something nice with it, and if we saw anything we thought you'd like, to tell him, and he'd give us as much more money as we needed. Then Aunt Trudy said she wanted to put some money with the ring-

fund money, and so did Winnie and so did Jack, so everybody did. Oh, yes, Hugh did, too. And we saw this pin and Shirley and I thought it would be nice because it had the turquoise in it like Aunt Trudy's ring, and Jack said it was a 'friendship circle' and that meant we were all friends of yours. So we bought it and it was seven dollars and a half," concluded Sarah who was nothing if not thorough.

"It's just beautiful," said Rosemary, with an April face of smiles and tears. "I'll always keep it and love you all for thinking so much of me."

She had wondered several times about the ring money, but the doctor had made no motion to give her back the bank. Neither had he mentioned returning the money again. Rosemary supposed that he would bring the subject up some time, but until he did she was content to forget about it. She did not know till weeks afterward that it was Jack Welles who had dissuaded the doctor from his plan to have the "fund" returned to those who had paid it.

"Rosemary earned the money fairly and squarely," he argued. "She earned it by the hardest kind of work and it seems mean to make her feel cheap. Those women were paying for

service and they got it, and they don't think any the less of Rosemary, either, if Aunt Trudy does moan along about 'degrading' the family. You're forever preaching that there is no disgrace in any kind of honest work, Hugh—"

"Oh, quit, I'm licked!" surrendered the doctor, laughing. "I won't mention the money to Rosemary, Jack. Though when I think of that child spending long, hot afternoons amusing cranky kids for pay— Still, it's pluck like that that makes the backbone of our country. What do you say if we take this money and buy her some little personal gimcrack? Girls like things to wear, I've always heard."

So Jack gained his point and the pretty pin was the result.

The days of vacation, "like the hairs of our heads" as Jack observed, were numbered now and the week before school was to open, Doctor Hugh made a flying trip to the sanatorium to see the little mother.

"You wouldn't know her, girls!" he told the three sisters, when he returned. "Her cheeks are actually a bit pink and though she is still awfully thin, her eyes are clear and bright. If three months can do her that much good, a year will set her on her feet. She says she lives on

your letters, and you mustn't let a week go past without writing. Rosemary must be a good censor, for Mother doesn't seem to worry about the house at all; I told her we were pulling together famously."

"Well, we are," said Rosemary contentedly. "I wish you'd look at Sarah, though, Hugh."

"I am looking at her," said the doctor. "She seems to have torn her dress."

"That's the one decent dress she has," responded Rosemary severely, "and now she hasn't a single thing to wear to school Monday."

"What does Mother do when you need clothes?" asked Doctor Hugh helplessly. "I suppose you'll all need dresses for school, won't you?"

"Mother has Miss Henry come and sew the first week in September," said Rosemary, "but Aunt Trudy says the sanatorium is expensive and she thinks we ought to try and cut down living expenses."

"I think we can still afford some new frocks," replied her brother, smiling. "Ask Aunt Trudy to engage Miss Henry, Rosemary, and to get her whatever she needs to outfit you sensibly for school. You'll have to remind me about shoes and hats and dresses, you know; an old bachelor

isn't expected to notice when these things wear shabby."

Miss Henry came and sewed a week, making new dresses and contriving and turning to make the best of several old ones. Monday morning, when school opened, the three Willis girls started off brave in new ginghams and Doctor Hugh assured them that he was proud of them.

"I wish I was in high school," said Rosemary wistfully, as Jack Welles joined them at the first corner.

"Two more years, and you will be," he consoled her. "I'll be a senior then, and I'll see that no one steps on you, Rosemary."

"Oh, nobody will," said Rosemary confidently.

And indeed she looked quite capable of taking care of herself. There was little of dependency about Rosemary and her lovely soft eyes were balanced by the firm white chin. "She is easily hurt, but her pride helps her to hide that," Winnie was fond of saying, "and don't be after forgetting that there's red in her hair, under the gold!"

The Eastshore school was a splendid type of the modern school, housing in one building the primary, grammar and high school grades.

Built on the extreme edge of the town, it faced an acre play-ground, evenly divided among the three schools. Principals and teachers were the best obtainable and indeed the State Board of education was fond of using Eastshore school as a model for others to follow. Mrs. Willis had often declared that she would never have sent her son to boarding school had the public school then been as excellent as that which Rosemary and her sisters attended.

This morning Rosemary was to enter the seventh grade in the grammar school, Sarah would be in the fourth primary and Shirley, having "graduated" from the kindergarten the year before, would attain the dignity of a seat in the first grade. Separating at the broad door, they were swept into the different streams that carried them up different stairways and into different classrooms and it was noon before they saw each other again. Few of the pupils went home to lunch and a large, light airy room on the third floor was set aside for their use as a lunch room. A corner table was reserved for teachers and here a small group usually gathered not only to eat and exchange comment, but to keep an eye on the lunchers and subdue the noise when it rose to a shout. The high school students had their

own lunch room, but the grammar and primary grades shared a room together.

"Well, what kind of people are in your room?" demanded Sarah, as she and Shirley met Rosemary at the little corner table the latter had secured and held for them. Rosemary had spread out the lunch Winnie had put up for them, and Shirley was already beginning on a sandwich.

"Oh, I like the girl who sits in front of me ever so much," returned Rosemary, cutting an apple into quarters for Shirley. "Her name is Elsie Stevens and they haven't lived in Eastshore long. Last year she went to the Port Reading school. Elsie Mears sits in back of me; she wasn't promoted. And Nina Edmonds is across the aisle."

"I don't think much of our teacher," announced Sarah, with deplorable frankness. "She doesn't look very bright and she says she is afraid of snakes."

"Well so am I," declared Rosemary. "I don't think any one is very bright who isn't."

"That's because you don't know anything about snakes," said Sarah, salting a boiled egg hurriedly. "Snakes are the best friends the farmer has."

"My teacher's name is Miss Farmer," chirped

Shirley sunnily. "And we have pink and red and blue crayons to draw on the blackboard with."

"Take another sandwich, darling," Rosemary urged her. "You're sure you won't get tired this afternoon? You went home at noon every day last year, you know."

"Yes, but I'm six now," Shirley reminded her sister. "Will we have home work in our room, Rosemary?"

It was one of Shirley's ambitions to have "home work" to do, and she longed to take a book home at night as Rosemary and Sarah did.

"I don't know—I shouldn't think so," answered Rosemary absently. "Sarah, Nina Edmonds wears her hair pinned up and no hair-ribbon."

"Well she looks crazy anyway, so what difference does it make?" was Sarah's comment on this news. "You can't go without a hair-ribbon, Rosemary, because your hair will all be in your eyes. Hugh said Nina was trying to be grown up and I guess she is."

But that night Rosemary spent half an hour before her mirror, trying to coax her bobbed curls into a knot like Nina Edmonds'. Rosemary's hair was growing very fast and she had promised Doctor Hugh not to have it cut again.

Just now it was an awkward length, but its curliness redeemed even that. Nina's straight blond locks were strained into a tortuous knot at the nape of her neck, for she, too, had decided not to bob her hair again. It was the absence of hair-ribbon that particularly appealed to Rosemary, for she had "spells" as Winnie called them, of wishing to appear grown up. At other times she was satisfied to be what Doctor Hugh insisted she should be content to be for several more years, "just a little girl."

CHAPTER XIV

TOO MUCH NATURAL HISTORY

WHEN the girls of the Eastshore school reached the seventh grade, they entered the cooking class. The white aprons and caps were much coveted and whatever other study might be neglected, each girl usually put her best into the weekly cooking lesson. There was a small stove for each and every young cook was responsible for the order and cleanliness in which her pots and pans and utensils were kept. Woe betide her, if Miss Parsons, the teacher, found an unwashed pan thrust under the sink in a moment of hurry.

"She's very particular," reported Rosemary, the evening after her first lesson in cooking. "She made Nina Edmonds take off her rings and she scolded Elsie Mears because she put her hands up to her hair just once, to tuck it back under her cap."

"And right she is," announced Winnie from the dining-room where she was setting the table

SARAH PULLED OUT A LITTLE DANGLING DARK OBJECT.

for breakfast. "A cook has got no business wearing rings, and I can't abide a girl who is always fussing with her hair when she is handling food."

"Winnie's a member of the sanitary squad," put in Doctor Hugh, smiling behind his newspaper. It was one of the rare times when he had an evening at home.

"Nina Edmonds makes me sick!" said Sarah vehemently. "She screamed when I showed her a darling little spotted snake I found to-day."

Sarah and Shirley had brought out the box of dominoes and were playing in the center of the floor. No amount of persuasion had ever induced them to play on a table.

"Don't talk about snakes, dearie," pleaded Aunt Trudy, shuddering over her knitting. "They are such ugly, horrid squirmy things,"

"Oh, no they're not Aunt Trudy," said Sarah earnestly. "That's because you're not used to them. Let me show you the one I've got in my pocket—"

To her aunt's horror, Sarah unbuttoned the pocket of her middy blouse and pulled out a little dangling dark object.

"Hugh!" shrieked Aunt Trudy, knocking over her chair as she rose hastily. "Hugh make her

stop! Ow! Rosemary, Winnie, take that awful thing away, quick!"

In spite of her sympathy for Aunt Trudy who was white to the lips with fright, Rosemary wanted to laugh, as Sarah, not realizing that her aunt was really in terror, and intent only on winning understanding for her snake, continued to advance on the unhappy lady, the spotted snake dangling from her hand.

"Sarah!" Doctor Hugh managed to halt the march of his determined small sister. "Sarah, take that snake away at once. At once, do you hear me? Aunt Trudy is afraid of snakes."

"Well, she wouldn't be, if she knew about 'em," insisted Sarah. "I only want to show her."

"You can't show her—lots of people are frightened by the sight of snakes," replied the doctor. "Take your snake out of the room this minute."

Still Sarah lingered.

"It's dead," she offered humbly. "A dead snake won't hurt Aunt Trudy will it?"

Doctor Hugh caught Rosemary's eye, and they went off into peals of laughter while poor Aunt Trudy wept and Shirley implored Rosemary to tell her what was "funny."

"Take your snake away and bury it, Sarah," said the doctor, when he could speak.

"And don't try to educate your relatives and friends to recognize the virtues of the reptile family; a person either likes snakes or can't abide 'em, and you and Aunt Trudy will never agree on that subject."

"I think you ought to forbid her to ever touch one, or carry one around with her," said Aunt Trudy when Sarah had gone out of the room sorrowfully to borrow a match box from Winnie to serve as a snake-coffin. "The idea of having a snake in one's pocket!"

"You can't separate Sarah and animals," returned Sarah's brother with conviction. "No use trying, Aunt Trudy. All this summer she was crazy on the subject of rabbits and cats and now she seems to have switched to snakes. About all we can do is to keep her within reasonable bounds and trust to luck that before the winter is over she will take up canary birds or something equally pleasing."

Aunt Trudy did not know Sarah's teacher, Miss Ames, but if she had they would have found a common bond of sympathy and interest in their horror of snakes and other unpleasant forms of animal life to which Sarah was devoted. Eleanor Ames was a nervous young woman and she found it distinctly trying to be

obliged to divide the interests of her class with a shoe-box of baby mice, or to soothe the ruffled feelings of timid little girls who had seen the bright eyes and wriggling slim body of a live snake peeping out of Sarah Willis' coat in the cloak room. Punishment seemed to have no effect on the culprit who stayed after school and cleaned blackboards with disconcerting cheerfulness and Miss Ames was considering the advisability of sending Sarah home with a note asking the co-operation of Doctor Hugh's authority, when something happened that took the matter out of her hands.

Late in October, one frosty morning on her way to school, Sarah made what was to her a great and lucky discovery. Shirley and Rosemary had gone on ahead of her, but Winnie had called her back to pick up the clothes she had strewn about her room with her customary careless abandon. Since the opening of school, Aunt Trudy had patiently made beds and put the rooms in order and she would never mention to her favorite Sarah a little matter like slippers in the middle of the rug, bath-robe flung down on the bed and every separate bureau drawer wide open and yawning. This morning Aunt Trudy was going to the city to shop, and the task of bed-mak-

ing would devolve upon Winnie who had no intention of having her duty complicated by others' neglect. A hasty glance into the room shared by Sarah and Shirley, and Winnie had summoned the former, in no uncertain voice, to "come up here and put your clothes away this instant." Sarah, complaining that she would certainly be late for school, had obeyed and if she had hurried could easily have reached the school before the assembly bell rang.

But crossing a vacant lot, Sarah came upon that which could make her forget school and time. A faint rustle under the dead leaves caught her quick ear and, stooping down, she uncovered a little snake, languid from the cold. Perhaps he had been on his way to winter quarters and the frost had caught him unaware. Anyway, he was numb and Sarah, murmuring affectionate nothings to him, slipped him into her pocket and then spent a valuable ten minutes poking about among the leaves in the hopes of discovering another, believing implicitly that snakes "always go in pairs." However, if the snake had a companion, diligent search failed to uncover it and Sarah was forced to take her reluctant way to school with only one snake to comfort and love. While she was still some distance

from the gate she heard the bell ring, and as she reasoned, she was late then, so why should she hurry when it would not save her a tardy mark? Morning exercises were in progress in the auditorium when Sarah entered the building, and she had her class room to herself. She hung up her hat and coat and took another peep at the snake. He seemed to be feeling better, but some fresh wave of sympathy led her to regret the necessity for leaving him to spend a lonely morning in the cloak room. With Sarah to think was to act, and she popped the snake into the pocket of her middy blouse, pinning it with a safety pin in lieu of a button and button hole. When the class returned from the auditorium, she was sitting sedately in her seat and appeared only mildly interested in the lecture on tardiness which followed.

"We'll have the papers distributed on which you worked during the last drawing lesson," announced Miss Ames unexpectedly. "The drawing supervisor will be around next week and we are a lesson or two late, here in our room. Instead of spelling this morning, I'll have you paint the leaves you drew. George Wright, you distribute the papers and Sarah Willis, you know where the paint boxes are."

Sarah was monitor for the drawing materials and she went up and down the aisles, giving each pupil a small paint box and two brushes, while George Wright gave out the papers on which the pencil sketches of autumn leaves had been drawn.

The warmth of the pocket evidently revived the chilled snake and, as Sarah was bending over the desk of Annabel Warde, a dainty little girl about her own age, a lithe green body shot from out Sarah's blouse, wriggled across the desk and dropped to the floor. The safety pin had left too large a loop-hole.

"A snake!" screamed Annabel, flinging her box of paints in one direction and the brushes Sarah had just given her, in the other. "I saw it! I saw it! Miss Ames, I saw a snake, and it's right here in this room. It'll bite us, I know it will and we'll die! Catch it, somebody, Oh, please hurry!"

Jumping up and down and shrieking, Annabel was beside herself with fright. Several other little girls began to scream, too, and the boys rushed around the room shouting that they would catch it and kill it, whatever "it" might be. None of them thought that Annabel had really seen a snake.

"Don't hurt it!" warned Sarah, down on her

hands and knees and hunting under the desks for her lost pet. "This kind of snake won't bite any one, and you mustn't hurt it. I want to keep it all winter and watch it grow."

Miss Ames was trying to calm Annabel who persisted in sitting on top of her desk with her feet curled under her, apparently under the delusion that a snake always attacks the ankles first, when George Wright whooped triumphantly.

"I see it—gee, it really is a snake!" he shouted. "Look out, Peter, let me shy this paper-weight at him—there, I'll bet that mashed him into jelly!"

There was a crash as the heavy paper-weight struck the floor and then a small whirlwind landed on the astonished George.

"How dare you try to kill my snake!" panted Sarah, crying with rage. "He never did anything to you! You're a great, cruel, cowardly boy, that's what you are!"

She was pummeling George unmercifully and he retaliated with interest, forgetting in the excitement and confusion that his antagonist was a girl. But while snakes might temporarily cow Miss Ames, a fight in her room was a situation she knew how to deal with.

"George! Sarah!" she descended upon the combatants and pulled them apart with no gentle hand. "I'm ashamed of you! What can you be thinking of! George, you must know better than to strike a girl, and Sarah, what would your mother say if she knew you were fighting with a boy? Why I never heard of such a thing—never!" and Miss Ames looked as though she never had.

Sarah darted over to the space behind the atlas table where George had thrown the paper weight. She lifted the glass cube and picked up the little mashed object under it.

"He's killed it!" she sobbed. "He went and killed my little snake!"

Miss Ames lost her patience which is not to be wondered at, considering the trying half hour she had endured.

"Sarah Willis, you march down to the principal's office," she said severely. "And throw that disgusting object in the trash can on your way down. Don't you ever bring another snake, alive or dead, into this room as long as I am the teacher. I want you to tell Mr. Oliver exactly what has occurred here this morning and be sure you explain to him that you fought George simply because he killed that wretched reptile."

Sarah's heart beat uncomfortably fast as she walked down the broad stone steps to the first floor where the principal's office was. Her class room was on the third floor. On the second floor she stopped and wrapped the dead snake in her handkerchief—for a wonder she had one—and when she reached the first floor she studied the pictures hung in the corridor with minutest care. For once in her short life Sarah was anxious to have time to stand still. Usually exasperatingly indifferent to rebuke or reproval, Miss Ames had hit upon the one punishment that Sarah could be fairly said to dread—an interview with the principal.

She approached the glass door marked "office" slowly. The door was closed. All the stories she had ever heard of the boys who had been "sent to the office," flashed through her mind. Few girls were ever thus punished and it was a fourth grade tradition that a girl bad enough to need an interview with the principal was always expelled. Sarah wondered what her brother would say if she came home and said she was expelled. Rosemary would feel the disgrace keenly —no one in the Willis family had even been expelled from school, Sarah was quite sure.

Did you knock, or did you go right in? Was

the principal always there? Perhaps he might be away for the day—Sarah devoutly hoped he would be. She shut her eyes tightly, took a firmer grip on the handkerchief containing the dead snake, and knocked on the glass panel.

"Come in," called a pleasant voice, a woman's voice.

Sarah opened the door and stepped in. She saw a large, sunny room with a desk in the center, and a smaller desk over by the window where a young woman was typing busily.

"Mr. Oliver isn't in, is he?" said Sarah speaking at a gallop. A swift glance had shown her that the young woman was the only person in the room.

"Just go right into the next office, and you'll find him," said Mr. Oliver's secretary, smiling.

CHAPTER XVI

MR. OLIVER AND SARAH

THE door into the next office stood open. Sarah walked in, that is, she stepped just inside the doorway and stood there as though glued to the floor. The thin, gray-haired man who was stooping over the flat-topped desk, looking at a card file, glanced up at her and smiled. This was the principal, Mr. Oliver.

"Good morning," he said. "Did you wish to see me?"

"No-o," stammered Sarah, "I didn't. But Miss Ames sent me."

Mr. Oliver sat down and pointed to a chair drawn up beside the desk.

"Suppose you come and sit down and tell me all about it," he suggested.

His secretary in the next room stepped over and closed the connecting door noiselessly as Sarah seated herself on the edge of the chair and stared unhappily at the floor.

"If you're in Miss Ames' room, you are a

fourth grader," said Mr. Oliver pleasantly. "What is your name?"

"Sarah," the small girl whispered, "Sarah Willis."

"Oh, yes—then you're a sister of Doctor Willis," said the principal. "And I know Rosemary, too. Isn't there another sister—a little light-haired girl in one of the grades?"

"That's Shirley," answered Sarah, forgetting her errand for an instant and looking Mr. Oliver in the face for the first time. "She's in the first grade."

"Well, Sarah, what have you to tell me?" said the principal quietly. "Why did Miss Ames send you to me?"

"I don't know where to begin," complained Sarah forlornly.

"Don't be afraid—there is nothing to be afraid of," said Mr. Oliver. "Just tell me everything that has happened and I promise to listen to you and believe you."

Sarah, as Doctor Hugh had discovered, was morally not very brave. She was afraid of people and though the Willis will was as strong in her as in any of the others, she would not come out openly and demand her way. Rather Sarah would do as she pleased and shirk the conse-

quences wherever possible. The doctor had had several little talks with her on this subject of fear and he was gradually teaching her to acknowledge her mistakes and wrong doings and patiently explaining at every opportunity the rules of fair play.

"It is both cowardly and contemptible to let someone else be blamed for what you have done," he said once to her. "I understand that you are not really a coward, Sarah—you have to fight an extra enemy called Fear. So when you do wrong and see a chance to escape blame and punishment and refuse to wriggle out, you are really braver than the girl who isn't afraid to say she did it. And every time you conquer Fear, Sarah, you've made the next conquest easier. You'll find that is so."

So this morning, in the principal's office, Sarah remembered what Doctor Hugh had said. She wanted dreadfully to retreat into one of her obstinate, sulky silences, and refuse to answer questions. She was afraid—afraid of a severe scolding and the disgrace of a public expulsion. Her knees were wobbling, but she slipped to her feet and stood facing Mr. Oliver bravely.

"If you're going to expel me," she said clearly,

"tell Hilda French I wanted her to have my pencil box."

And then the tears came.

She cried and cried and as she wept she told the story and though drawings of leaves and paint boxes and middy blouse pockets and snakes and paper weights seemed to be hopelessly mixed in her sobbing conversation, Mr. Oliver, in some miraculous fashion, pieced together the disconnected bits and declared that he understood perfectly. He loaned Sarah his extra clean handkerchief on which to dry her eyes, her own handkerchief being obviously employed, for she had laid the pathetic remains of the dead snake on his desk, and when she was more quiet he told her kindly that there was no question of expulsion.

"I don't know where you ever got such an idea," he said, smiling a little, and he looked so friendly and not at all angry, that Sarah even managed a faint, watery smile in response. "Boys and girls are never expelled from school except for very serious reasons. You've made a little mistake, that's all and I'll show you where you were wrong in just a minute. Sometimes we want our own way so much, we can't see how we can be wrong."

Sarah blushed a little, but nodded honestly.

"Well, you see, as soon as you found out that Miss Ames didn't like snakes in her class room, you should have stopped right there," said Mr. Oliver decidedly. "You disobeyed Miss Ames and all this trouble came from that. If she said her class room was no place for snakes and mice —you brought mice one day, didn't you?—that should have settled the question for you."

"But how will the children ever learn about snakes?" asked Sarah earnestly.

"They'll learn, if they are interested," answered Mr. Oliver. "You can't force anyone to adopt your likes and dislikes, you know, Sarah. Rosemary may like to sew and you may say you 'hate' to touch a needle, but do you make yourself into an ardent needlewoman, simply because Rosemary enjoys sewing? Don't you see? I'm afraid you'll have to give Miss Ames and me your promise that you will not bring any more snakes, alive or dead, or any other animal to school."

Sarah promised slowly, her eyes on the dead snake.

"He was such a lovely specimen," she mourned. "I s'pose maybe he was valuable."

"I tell you what to do, Sarah," said Mr. Oliver quickly. "You don't know Mr. Martin, do you? He teaches biology in the high school

and I must take you up to his room some day and let you see the 'specimens' he has. He has a menagerie that fills one side of a large room. Whenever you find something you can't resist, you bring it here to me in the office and I'll turn it over to Mr. Martin. In that way your class room won't be upset and Mr. Martin will likely gain some valuable additions to his collection. Don't you think that is a good plan?"

Sarah said she thought it was, and then, as the noon bell rang throughout the building, Mr. Oliver shook hands with her and told her that if she ever needed advice or help to come directly to him. He promised, too, to speak to Miss Ames and tell her that no more snakes or other lively "specimens" would be brought into her room by Sarah. He opened the door for her and she was free.

She sped along the corridors, her snake in her hand again, but it was a far happier Sarah than the little girl who had walked slowly through them an hour and a half ago. Up to the lunch room dashed this Sarah, and startled Rosemary who was opening the lunch box at their corner table by her demand, "I have to bury a snake—will you come help me?"

Of course she had to tell what had happened

that morning, and Rosemary and Shirley agreed that Mr. Oliver was "just as nice as nice could be."

"Though I do hope, Sarah, this will teach you to let snakes alone," said Rosemary in the elder-sister tone she rarely used. "You frightened Aunt Trudy into fits and now you've upset a whole class. No, don't show me that ugly little snake—I'm sorry he is dead because you are, but I don't want to see him; I couldn't eat a bit of lunch. Come on, and eat your sandwiches and then we will go down and bury him somewhere on the play-ground."

That night at dinner Rosemary had an announcement to make. Her eyes shining like stars and her face glowing, she declared that she had been appointed to plan and serve the dinner to be given by the grammar school teachers for the Institute visitors.

"Institute is the second week in November," bubbled Rosemary, "and there will be about ten visiting teachers from the towns within twenty-five miles. Miss Parsons says I'm the best cook in the class though Bessie Kent is older than I am and Fannie Mears had cooking last year."

"But can you cook a dinner?" asked Doctor Hugh. "Seems to me that's a pretty large order

for a class of young girls and with visitors expected, too."

"Oh, we know just what to do," said Rosemary confidently. "I have to make out the menu and submit it to Miss Parsons by Friday of this week. And then I have to choose the girls I want to help me cook, and those to set and wait on the tables—this year we're going to have small tables instead of one large one. And we girls are to do every bit of the work ourselves!"

Aunt Trudy and Winnie beamed on Rosemary, sure that she would do well whatever she undertook, while Sarah demanded to know who the waitresses were to be.

"Well, Nina Edmonds for one," said Rosemary and the doctor frowned involuntarily. Although Nina seldom came to the house and he knew that Rosemary saw little of her outside of school, he could not help but see that her influence continued to be remarkably strong.

"Nina's an awful chump," declared Sarah who cordially disliked her and was in turn, disliked by Nina.

"She is not!" flared Rosemary. "And, Aunt Trudy she has the loveliest blue velvet dress. She says she can wear it under her apron and

then, after dinner when we take our aprons off, she will look all right. Couldn't I wear my new brown velvet that night?"

"Why I don't know," replied Aunt Trudy uncertainly. "I don't think it would be very suitable, dear. What do you think, Hugh?"

"Don't know anything about clothes," he said shortly.

"You only want to wear it because Nina Edmonds is going to wear a velvet dress," commented Sarah shrewdly.

"It will be awfully hot," said Shirley with unexpected wisdom.

"Well, I'm going to wear it, if Aunt Trudy doesn't say not to," announced Rosemary, her chin in the air. "Though I'd give anything if I had some high heeled pumps to make me look taller. Honestly, Hugh, I'm about the only girl in our class who doesn't wear 'em."

He smiled at her pleasantly, but there was no yielding in his voice.

"When you're sixteen, if you still want them, I'll have nothing to say," he said. "Mother has said you are not to wear them until then, you know, and if I had my way no woman, sixteen or sixty, should teeter about in silly anguish. I can't help it if the girls are skipping five years,

Rosemary; as I've often reminded you, the calendar says you are still a little girl."

Rosemary pouted a little, but she did not dare argue, the subject of high heeled shoes having been long one of her secret sorrows. She knew from experience that her brother would never consent to the purchase of a pair and though she mentioned them from time to time, it was without hope of converting him to her opinion.

She was in her room that night, collecting her cooking notes and recipes, in preparation for making out the important menu, when Winnie peeped in. The brown velvet dress lay on Rosemary's bed where she had spread it, the better to admire its charms. It was a new frock and so far she had worn it only twice. Simply made, with a square neck and a touch of ivory colored lace in the form of a vestee and at the bottom of the sleeves, it was the most becoming dress Rosemary had ever had. She knew it, too.

"There's just one thing I want to say to you, Rosemary," announced Winnie earnestly, "and that's this: you have got to make up your mind which is the more important—this dinner or your dress. Because cooking a good dinner takes all the brains a cook has—I ought to know. You can't be thinking about whether you're going to

get a spot on your frock or whether the last hook is caught or left open. And if you're too warm, as you will be in a velvet dress in that hot kitchen and you all excited anyway, or if your feet hurt you, you're not going to be able to give your attention to what you are cooking. And I may not know much about teachers, but I imagine they're like anybody else—when they're hungry, a brown velvet dress won't make up to them for soggy potatoes and underdone meat. Miss Parsons is banking on you—likely as not she's told the teachers you're the best cook in the class, and if you serve up a poor dinner, do you suppose looking at your velvet dress is going to make her glad she trusted you? Of course you can suit yourself, and I'm not trying to influence you, because you're old enough to—"

Rosemary rushed at her and hugged her warmly.

"You're a dear, darling Winnie!" she cried affectionately. "I'll stop thinking about what I'm going to wear this minute, and go to work on what I'm going to cook. Miss Parsons hates fussy clothes, anyway, and I'll wear my white linen under my apron and be comfortable. Hugh thinks I'm silly to wear the velvet, I know he does."

"The velvet will keep," said Winnie tersely, "and I'll do up your white linen for you so that it will look like new."

But, left alone, Rosemary could not resist trying on the brown frock. She pinned her hair high, pushing it into a tower-effect with the aid of combs, and added a long string of red beads that almost touched the floor.

"I look so nice this way," she told the reflection in the glass, naïvely. "Why isn't it ever sensible to wear your best clothes when you expect to be busy?"

And that is a question older folk than Rosemary have asked, but, unlike her, they have learned the answer.

CHAPTER XVII

THE INSTITUTE DINNER

ROSEMARY early encountered the usual difficulties that beset the leader of any enterprise. The girls she selected to act as cooks wept because they were not appointed waitresses and those tolled off to serve at the tables were affronted because they had not been elected to cook.

"You're the general, Rosemary," said Miss Parsons, when rumors of dissatisfaction reached her. "Give your orders and see that they are obeyed. You are in absolute charge of this dinner and no one is to be allowed to dictate to you."

The Willis will and the Willis chin were good possessions to have in this crisis and gradually Rosemary managed to achieve something approaching harmony among her staff. Only Fannie Mears resolutely refused to be won over.

"I'm just as good a cook as you are," she said to Rosemary one afternoon, "and anyway, if I'm not, cooking isn't the most important thing in

school." (Fannie, you see, wasn't exactly logical.) "I'll serve as a waitress," she went on "because I have a good deal of class feeling and I don't want the other grades to say we made a failure of our dinner. But I want you to know that I don't like it one single bit and I think you are anything but fair."

Despite such small troubles, Rosemary enjoyed her responsibility and as she was free from nervousness and had faith in her skill and ability, the prospective dinner, under her planning, took shape nicely and gave every evidence of being a success. Nina Edmonds was in charge of the tables and waitresses and as she really knew how to lay the service correctly and had clever ideas for decorating, Rosemary was sure the dining room would present an attractive appearance.

She went home early the day the dinner was to be given, to dress, and found everything carefully arranged on her bed by Winnie who had devoted half a day to the laundering of the white frock and cleaning the white shoes. There was no school Institute Day, but Rosemary, of course, had been busy all day, preparing for the dinner to follow the close of the meetings.

"You look like my girl," said Docotor Hugh, kissing her when she came down to the hall and

found him waiting. "I thought I'd run you over to the school—you don't want to get tired out before the evening has begun, you know. And what time do you think the fireworks will be over? Do you have to stay after dinner is safely eaten?"

"No, Miss Parsons has three women who are coming in to clear up for us," answered Rosemary. "Usually we have to wash our own dishes, that is, after every cooking lesson; but Miss Parsons said as soon as the dining room was cleared, we might go, unless we want to attend the reception in the gym. Jack said he might come and if he does he'll bring me home."

"There'll be no if about it," announced the doctor decidedly. "I'll drop in around half-past nine and bring you home in the car. If I'm a bit later, you wait for me in the gym and then I'll know where to find you."

Aunt Trudy and Winnie and Shirley and Sarah crowded to the door to watch Rosemary off, in the dear way of loving families who would send those they love off on always successful expeditions, and as the doctor helped her into the roadster, Jack Welles came up, still in football togs, for he had been practising.

"To-night's the big night, isn't it?" he asked,

smiling. "You're going to stay for the reception, aren't you, Rosemary? And we can walk home together."

"Hugh's coming for me in the car," said Rosemary. "I wasn't sure you were going, Jack."

"Well I told you I was," retorted Jack. "I thought, living next door to you, I could save Hugh an extra trip."

"You come home with us, and we'll save you a walk," suggested the doctor, touching the starter, and Jack shouted after them that he would.

"What made you say that?" demanded Rosemary, flushing with vexation.

"Why not?" countered her brother." "Jack's a good friend, Rosemary, isn't he?"

"Of course he is," said Rosemary warmly, "But, oh, well, you wouldn't understand, because you're not a girl. He did say he was going to the reception, but I would much rather ride home with you; and now he'll know I know he said he was going, and if you hadn't asked him he might think I wasn't sure he had said so."

"You may know what you are talking about, but I don't," declared her bewildered brother. "However, as you wisely observe, I am not a girl and perhaps that accounts for my dullness. Here we are at the school, and whatever you do,

Rosemary, don't fail to give them enough. Anything but a sliver of chicken and a cube of potato for a hungry man, remember."

Rosemary laughed, and ran up the path to the lighted door. The corridors were deserted, though the sound of music came from the auditorium, where the teachers were meeting. Upstairs the kitchen and the lunch room, which was to serve as dining room, were ablaze with light and girls in white caps and aprons were rushing about, giggling excitedly and getting in each other's way.

"Oh, Rosemary!" Nina Edmonds pounced upon her at once. "Come and see if the tables don't look pretty. Did you wear your brown velvet?" she added in a lower tone.

Rosemary shook her head.

"White linen," she stated briefly. "I can't bother about clothes to-night, Nina. I want to put the soup on to re-heat right away."

Nina insisted that she must see the tables first and they did look pretty, with a vase of yellow "button" chrysanthemums in the center of each and yellow ribbons running from the bouquet to the place cards.

"Rosemary," Miss Parsons beckoned to her, "I just tasted the soup and it is delicious, but I

think a grain more of salt will improve it. Just a dash, dear, and if you're afraid of getting too much in, don't touch it. Everything going all right?"

"All right," nodded Rosemary, forbearing to mention that Fannie Mears refused to speak to her and was evidently cherishing a smoldering resentment that might burst into flame at an awkward moment. Two of the girls were limping about in high heeled shoes and these must be shielded from the critical eye and caustic tongue of the cooking teacher, lest they become temperamental and refuse to "wait" at all. Assuredly Rosemary had her hands full.

She went into the kitchen, tasted the soup and salted it carefully. It was rich and smooth and Rosemary felt that when the time came to ladle it into the cups she would have every right to be proud of her ability, for she alone had made the soup, the other girls fearing the mysterious "curdling" that sometimes spoiled their product.

Just before serving time, Miss Parsons called her for a whispered consultation as to the seating of a special guest and when Rosemary returned to the kitchen, she found the trays of soup cups ready on the table. While she and two other girls filled them, the teachers were coming into

the dining room and finding their places by means of the prettily lettered cards. By the time all were seated, seven young waitresses were filing into the room, bearing in their hands the trays of steaming soup.

They made a pretty picture and the guests smiled graciously as the cups of thick cream soup, each with four delicately browned croutons swimming on the top, were placed before them. The girls returned to the kitchen as soon as all were served, for Miss Parsons had instructed Rosemary to have them help her with the dishes for the next course instead of waiting around the room for the guests to finish.

Rosemary had decided to have a simple, hearty dinner, since the weather was cold and many of the teachers would have a long ride to reach their homes that night. So individual chicken pies, baked potatoes and a corn pudding were to follow the soup, the young cook having wisely determined to omit any extra frills that would add to the difficulties of serving.

"Nobody's touched the soup!" reported Nina Edmonds, who was the first to return with her tray, when the buzzer under Miss Parson's chair sounded the signal in the kitchen that it was time to remove the first course.

"Nobody touched it!" echoed Rosemary in alarm. "Let me see!"

She hurried around the table to inspect Nina's tray. Sure enough, six little cups, still filled with soup, were there.

"Say, something's the matter with the soup," said Bessie Kent in a shrill whisper as she came in with her tray. "They didn't eat it—see, all the cups are full."

"Did Miss Parsons say anything?" asked Rosemary, staring at the trays which now surrounded her. "How does she look?"

"Kind of queer," answered Fannie Mears, breaking her silence. "She must feel funny, with all those folks sitting and looking at their soup and not eating it."

"You hush up!" said Bessie Kent rudely. "There's the buzzer. Come on, girls, we'd better hustle."

In a daze Rosemary saw to it that the trays were filled again, but she took no pride in the beautifully browned pies, the fragrant corn pudding or the glistening potatoes wrapped in snowy napkins. Her dinner, she was sure, was ruined. She wanted to run home and cry where no one would see her, but instead she saw to it that each girl had what she needed on her tray.

Then, when her two assistants were arranging the forks and plates for the salads, Rosemary slipped over to the table where she had put the soup kettle and tasted the contents.

Salt! The soup was so thick with salt that she choked. Rich and thick and smooth, what did it matter the texture or flavor, since only one overpowering taste was present—that of salt.

"How could it get like that!" puzzled Rosemary as she drank a glass of water. "I tasted it just before we served it and it was fine. What on earth must Miss Parsons be thinking of me!"

Empty plates were carried back to the kitchen next time, and word reached the young cooks that the pies were "wonderful" or "simply great" —this last the expressed opinion of Mr. Oliver —and the fruit salad met with an equally hearty reception. But not even the evident enthusiastic approval which greeted the delicious ice-cream and cake and perfect coffee which concluded the dinner, could compensate Rosemary for her earlier mortification. When the meal was over and the guests had gone down to the gymnasium for the reception and the other girls had shed their aprons and followed, Nina too eager to display the blue velvet frock to wait for Rosemary

who insisted there were several things she had to attend to, then she felt she might cry a little for the first time in that long evening.

"Rosemary, my dear child, what is the matter?" Miss Parsons bustled in, followed by the three elderly women who were to wash the dishes. "Are you tired out? Was the dinner too much work?"

"The soup!" choked Rosemary. "Nobody could eat it. And I took such pains with it."

"Well, I was sorry afterward that I told you to salt it again," said Miss Parsons regretfully. "I suppose you were nervous and added too much. But don't let that grieve you dear. The rest of the dinner was perfectly delicious and you should hear what people are saying about you. I want you to come down to the gymnasium now and meet some of the teachers."

"Miss Parsons, I didn't oversalt the soup," protested Rosemary earnestly. "I tasted it before and added just a dash as you told me; and then I tasted it again, and it was all right. I *know* I didn't put in too much salt."

"Oh, nonsense, Rosemary, you were excited, that's all," said Miss Parsons briskly. "Any one is likely to make a mistake when she has a good deal on her mind. Don't give it another

thought, and if you do, just remember it is a warning against the next time. I like to think that every mistake we make keeps us from running into danger some other time when the results might be more serious."

Rosemary followed her teacher down to the gymnasium, but she only half heard the introductions that followed and the kind comments on her skill in cooking. She was wondering how she could convince Miss Parsons that she had never put all that salt into her soup.

"Why it tasted as though a whole box of salt had just been thrown into it," said Rosemary to herself, standing near a window to watch for Doctor Hugh and the car. "I don't care how much any one has on her mind, no one puts a whole box of salt into a soup kettle!"

And the voices of a group of girls, going home early, floated up to her.

"She says she didn't do it," said one of them, and Rosemary could not identify the speaker though the tone sounded familiar. "But if it had been good I'll bet she would have taken all the credit. They say it was fairly briny, it was so salty!"

Rosemary flushed scarlet. It wasn't fair!

"For I didn't, I didn't, I know I didn't!" she

declared, sitting between Doctor Hugh and Jack that night as they sped home in the car. "I'm just as sure as I can be that I didn't make a mistake—why I tasted it afterward and it was delicious."

"Well, if you didn't oversalt it, who did?" asked Jack practically.

"I don't know," admitted Rosemary. "I could cry when I think of it."

"I wouldn't do that," said her brother, turning in at their driveway. "How about making us a chicken pie for Sunday dinner, Rosemary, and asking Jack over to sample it?"

"I'll make it," agreed Rosemary, "but just the same I want to know who salted my soup."

CHAPTER XVIII

SHIRLEY IN MISCHIEF

THE chicken pie was a wonderful success, so Doctor Hugh and Jack assured Rosemary at the Sunday dinner, but the mystery of the oversalted soup seemed destined to remain unsolved. Miss Parsons never mentioned it again and Rosemary herself might have forgotten it more readily except for several ill-natured references by Fannie Mears whenever the Institute dinner was spoken of. Fannie and Rosemary did not get along very well together and this was, in one way, odd, because Fannie and Nina Edmonds were apparently most congenial. They usually ate their lunches together, but Rosemary chose to be with Sarah and Shirley and their corner table was usually crowded with younger girls who adored Rosemary openly.

The brief Thanksgiving holidays—with no school from Thursday to Monday—brought the Willis family a more sincere appreciation of their blessings than ever before. A short note from

the little mother lay beside each plate on Thanksgiving Day morning, and Winnie kept one hand on hers tucked in her apron pocket even when she served the golden brown waffles. When Aunt Trudy asked who would go to church with her, Doctor Hugh answered for them all.

"We'll please Mother," he said simply, and after the service he packed the three girls into the little roadster and carried them off for a long cold ride that gave them famous appetites for Winnie's dinner.

Doctor Hugh's practice was growing to include a wide radius of countryside and the "young doctor" was gaining a name as one never "too busy" to answer a country call. Doctor Jordan had prolonged his vacation till late in October and then had returned to Eastshore just long enough to sell his practice, office and instruments to his young colleague and set off on a leisurely trip to California, a luxury well earned after years of sacrificing service. Doctor Hugh still retained the Jordan office, while seeing an increasing number of patients at his home within fixed hours.

His office had a great attraction for Shirley, and Rosemary had discovered her one afternoon standing on a chair and calmly smelling the rows

of bottles that stood on the cabinet shelf, one after the other. The shining instruments, in their glass racks, had a fascination all their own for the small girl and she declared that she intended to be a doctor when she grew up.

"All right, and I'll take you into practice with me," Doctor Hugh promised, having surprised her in a hurried investigation of his medicine case. "But leave all these things alone, until you are ready to study medicine. Don't come in the office when I'm not here, Shirley; you'll hurt yourself some day, if you are not careful."

But Shirley was possessed with the idea that she would like to be a doctor. She begged and carefully treasured all the empty bottles and pill boxes she could gather; she demanded a knife for "operations" and was highly indignant when Winnie gave her a pair of blunt scissors and told her they would have to do; usually tender-hearted, she drew the wrath of Sarah by declaring that she would like to cut off a rabbit's leg, "just like a doctor."

"I think you're a cruel, cold-blooded girl!" stormed Sarah. "Cut off a rabbit's foot indeed! Why don't you cut off your own foot and see how it feels?"

"Oh, Shirley just says that," Rosemary tried

to soothe her outraged sister. "She wouldn't hurt a rabbit any more than you would, Sarah. You know that. But you've gone without dessert twice for meddling with Hugh's things, Shirley, and you did promise to remember after the last time, you know."

Shirley, deprived of pudding and charlotte, was grieved and penitent, but her memory was resilent and the day after Thanksgiving temptation assailed her again. Winnie had gone to carry a pie to an old neighbor several blocks away, Sarah was out playing with a school chum and Rosemary and Aunt Trudy were deep in the discussion of new curtains for the former's room. Shirley was left to amuse herself and her small feet carried her to the empty office.

"Jennie needs an operation," whispered Shirley, her dancing eyes roving toward the desk.

As luck would have it, a curved scalpel lay there in plain view. Ordinarily it would have been locked up safely, but Doctor Hugh, hurriedly selecting his choice of instruments that morning, had not bothered to replace it in the rack. Shirley went over to the desk, picked up the shining silver thing and carefully put it down.

"I'll go get Jennie," she said to herself.

"She's very, very bad this morning, and I ought to 'tend to her right away."

Upstairs she trotted, past Aunt Trudy's room and on to her room and Sarah's where she rescued Jennie from under the bed.

"What are you doing, honey?" called Rosemary, as Shirley passed the door again on her way down stairs.

"Playing with Jennie," was the wholly satisfactory answer.

"I think she plays better by herself than with Sarah," announced Aunt Trudy. "Sarah is so apt to lead her into mischief. Would you rather have a hem-stitched hem or ruffles, Rosemary?"

Back in the office, Shirley wasted no time in planning what to do. She knew exactly how to proceed. Jennie was placed on the desk and Shirley climbed into the swivel chair and grasped the scalpel. The "operation" was to be performed on Jennie's arm, she, as a celluloid doll, possessing an odd ridge in her anatomy that had always puzzled Shirley. What made the ridge and what the inside of Jennie looked like, were two questions that young doctor was determined to have settled.

Jennie proved unexpectedly difficult to cut. Shirley stuck out her tongue in her anxiety and

breathed hard as she tried to drive the scalpel in. It slipped suddenly, the chair tilted and the curved shining blade cut a cruel gash in the little hand holding it so tightly.

Pain, fright and a guilty conscience were blended in Shirley's scream. Rosemary came rushing down, followed by Aunt Trudy who added her cries to the child's when she saw her doubled up on the floor, rocking back and forth and calling for Rosemary.

"Are you hurt, darling? What's the matter? Tell Auntie," begged Aunt Trudy bending over the little girl.

"I cut my hand!" Shirley straightened up and Aunt Trudy caught a glimpse of the bleeding hand and the front of the child's blouse all stained where she had held it.

The sight of blood always unnerved Aunt Trudy. She shrieked now and covered her eyes with her hands.

"I can't look at it—I'll faint, I know I shall!" she cried. "Shirley will bleed to death, Rosemary. She has an awful cut. What shall we do! What shall we do!"

The terrified Shirley began to scream more loudly and Aunt Trudy walked up and down the floor moaning that it was awful!

"I'll get Hugh!" Rosemary flew to the desk 'phone.

She had heard him say where he meant to make a call and she hoped desperately that he might be at that house or that she might be able to leave a message for him if he had not yet arrived. But the doctor had "come and gone" Mrs. Jackson said. He was going to stop at the Winters, he said. Yes, they had a telephone.

Three more numbers Rosemary called, before she gained a ray of comfort. At the fourth farmhouse the farmer's wife said that the doctor was expected back in twenty minutes with a new brace he had wanted them to try for their son's foot. He had offered to bring it to them from the post-office because her husband was sick himself with a cold—

Rosemary managed to check the good woman's flow of conversation and to ask her to tell Doctor Hugh that he was wanted at home, when he came. Shirley, tell him, had cut her hand.

Shirley's cries, subdued while Rosemary talked over the 'phone, burst out again as the receiver clicked in place.

"Oh, dearest, hush!" implored Rosemary. "It

doesn't hurt you so very much, does it? Can't you be quiet till Hugh comes and makes you all well?"

"It bleeds and bleeds," screamed Shirley, and Aunt Trudy groaned that the child would bleed to death before their eyes.

"I'll wash it and bind it up myself," declared Rosemary, distracted by the noise and confusion. "I don't know anything about such things, but I think I can make it stop bleeding."

"I can't help you," said Aunt Trudy hastily. "I faint the minute I see blood. My knees are weak now. Don't ask me to hold her, will you, Rosemary?"

"I won't," promised Rosemary, biting her lower lip to keep it from trembling. "I can take care of her, I know I can. Hugh keeps bandages in this lower drawer and Winnie always has hot water in the tea-kettle."

Aunt Trudy frankly ran from the room when Rosemary returned from the kitchen with a basin of warm water and arranged a package of gauze and the scissors on the glass topped table between the windows.

"I can't stay—I simply can not stay," she stammered and ran upstairs to lie on her bed with her fingers in her ears.

Her going was rather a relief to Rosemary who was sure she would be less nervous and shaky herself with her aunt out of the room. But before she had finished with Shirley she was ready to admit that the mere presence of a third person would have been some comfort, however cold.

For Shirley shrieked protestingly when Rosemary approached her to carry her over to the table. She fought off all attempts to look at her hand. And when Rosemary forced her to yield and gently plunged the poor little hand into the basin of water which was promptly stained deep scarlet, Shirley, sure she was bleeding to death, pulled away and ran for the door.

"Oh, darling, don't act this way," begged Rosemary, catching her and holding her close. "Be a brave little girl and let sister wrap the hand for you; it isn't such a bad cut, dear, and after we have washed off the blood, there'll be nothing to be afraid of."

But Shirley continued to sob and squirm all the while Rosemary cut and wound the gauze about her hand. As nearly as the inexperienced Rosemary could tell, the cut was not serious though it was ugly to see. Just as she fastened the tiny safety pin in place and was ready to

pronounce her bandaging done, the familiar two honks of the car sounded outside.

"Oh, Hugh, I never was so glad to see you in my life!" exclaimed Rosemary, as the doctor appeared in the doorway. "Shirley cut her hand and she screamed and screamed and Aunt Trudy cried and it was awful."

"Must have been," said Doctor Hugh briefly. "Let's see the cut."

Shirley, exhausted from crying and struggling, made a feeble attempt to put her hand behind her, but the doctor held her firmly between his knees and inspected the bandage.

"Pretty neat job," he said approvingly.

Shirley began to cry again as he unwound the gauze and when he asked Rosemary to hand him a certain bottle and pour some of its contents on the cut, the little girl's shrieks of pain were heart-rending. Rosemary watched in amazement as her brother calmly dressed the cut with fresh gauze and then, when he had finished, gathered Shirley up in his arms to soothe her gently.

"She'll go to sleep in a minute," he said quietly. "She's worn out with crying. How did it happen?"

Shirley heard him and half raised herself in his arms.

"I was going to operate on Jennie," she sobbed. "And the nasty knife cut me. But I won't ever touch anything again, Hugh. Honest, I won't."

In a few minutes she was sound asleep, and the doctor placed her on the couch in one corner of the room and covered her with a light blanket.

"Had a tough time, didn't you, Rosemary?" he said understandingly, glancing from the basin on the table to Rosemary's tired face. "Nobody home to help you and Aunt Trudy screaming louder than Shirley I'll bet. I remember Aunt Trudy in hysterics when I came home from school with a black eye one day."

"Well, I felt like screaming, too," admitted Rosemary, "the blood did make me a little sick. But then there would have been no one to look after Shirley. I did the best I could, but I'm a poor nurse, Hugh."

"You never lose your head and that's the first rule for a good nurse," said her brother. "Many a girl would never have thought of trying to follow me up on the 'phone. And that was a mighty neat bandage you did, child. You ought to learn first-aid, Rosemary. Every girl should know what to do in an emergency or accident. I'll teach you, if you like."

Rosemary was wise enough to accept his offer and her first-aid lessons began that week, for Doctor Hugh did not believe in postponement. He was determined, though he did not say to his sister, to "make hysterics difficult" under any circumstances and especially in a household emergency.

CHAPTER XIX

BUCKING THE STUDENT COUNCIL

EARLY December brought cold weather in its train and unusually heavy snows. Householders were kept busy shoveling walks clean and the boys and girls reveled in plenty of coasting. Sarah was invariably late for supper these days and no amount of scolding from Winnie, or pleading from Aunt Trudy, could induce her to desert the hill as long as a single coaster remained to keep her company. Finally Doctor Hugh devised a plan of going around that way before he came home and, if Sarah were there, picking her and the sled up bodily and bestowing them in the car.

"I'll bet I know something you don't," said Fannie Mears one noon, coming over with Nina Edmonds to sit at the corner table with Rosemary in bland indifference to scowls from Sarah and sighs from Shirley.

Fannie Mears and Rosemary were not close friends at all, and the latter was surprised at the

overture. But she hospitably swept part of the lunch aside to make room for the visitors and offered them a couple of Winnie's delicious egg sandwiches.

"Thanks, we have enough," said Fannie. "Have you heard what the boys are going to do?"

"Boys" with Fannie, meant the high school lads as Rosemary immediately understood. The boys in the seventh grade failed to interest either Fannie or Nina.

"No, what?" answered Sarah bluntly, in blissful ignorance that she was not supposed to be included in the conversation.

"The Common Council has asked 'em to clean off the streets," announced Fannie, addressing herself to Rosemary, "and Jack Welles is going to make himself awfully unpopular, if he isn't careful."

"Clean off the streets?" repeated Rosemary. "Why what do you mean?"

"There's been so many storms, they haven't been able to keep some of the streets clear of snow," explained Nina, biting into a cup cake, for Nina lunched almost exclusively on cake. "They've had gangs of men working, but before they get one snow carted away, another falls. And now the Common Council has decided to

ask the high school boys to work after school. My father is a Councilman, and he told us all about the last meeting. They'll pay the boys and it will be a regular lark."

"Yes, if Jack Welles doesn't go and spoil everything," said Fannie darkly.

"How can he spoil everything?" Rosemary demanded.

She had not seen Jack so often once the school year was well under way. Football practice had absorbed him during the early fall and later came basketball. Other school and class activities, too, claimed his attention, for Jack was popular and a good student as well. He was president of his class, the Sophomores, and had that year been appointed Student Advisor to the grammar school boys.

"How can Jack spoil things?" repeated Rosemary.

Fannie leaned across the table—she dearly loved to be important and now she had something to tell.

"It's like this," she began. "My brother told me. The Student Council had a letter from the Eastshore Common Council, saying they wanted volunteer snow workers among the high school boys. And the S. C. called the presidents of

the four classes together and told them to go ahead and get the workers, twelve from each class."

Fannie stopped and looked at Rosemary expectantly. Sarah's mouth was wide open and she was listening eagerly. Shirley had wandered away to play.

"Well?" said Rosemary sharply.

"Well," echoed Fannie disagreeably. "The boys made out their lists and when Jack read his he had asked the two Gordon boys, Jerry and Fred, and Eustice Gray and Norman Cox and Ben Kelsey. And Will says the president of the Student Council was simply furious."

Rosemary began to fold up the napkins and put them back in the box. Will Mears was Fannie's brother and the other boys she knew only by sight.

"Why was Frank Fenton furious?" asked Sarah, delighting in the sound of the three F's, though quite unconscious she had used them.

"Oh, do be still!" Fannie tried to squelch the younger girl. "Frank was mad, of course, because the S. C. counted on having all the snow money for the dramatic fund. They want to put on a play this spring and Will says they haven't a cent in the treasury. And now Jack

Welles goes and spoils a perfectly splendid chance to earn a lot of money."

"That's the third or fourth time you've said that about Jack," cried Rosemary, stung into speech at last. "What has he done to spoil anything? I don't see."

"Why I should think you would," said Fannie, while Nina nodded sagely. "The Gordon boys and Eustice and Norman and Ben are as poor as can be; they want the money for themselves, and Will says they jumped at the chance to earn it. Don't you see, it will keep that much out of the dramatic fund, and Jack could just as well have appointed boys who could have been glad to turn over the money to the school. Will calls it a disgusting lack of class spirit."

Rosemary's blue eyes snapped and fire burned in her cheeks.

"There's nothing the matter with Jack Welles' class spirit, Fannie Mears!" she cried. "I should think you would be ashamed to repeat anything like that, I don't care who said it."

"Well I'm not the only one who said it, or Will, either," declared Fannie, rising as the warning bell sounded. "The president of the Student Council told him what he thought of him, all right."

Inwardly seething, Rosemary managed to get away to her class room without further argument. She had never liked Fannie Mears, she told herself and now she almost hated her. As for Will Mears, president of the High School Juniors, well he wasn't a bit better. What a disagreeable family the Mears must be!

It was cooking class day, and Rosemary stayed almost an hour after school that night, "puttering" as Miss Parsons called it, about the school kitchen. Sarah and Shirley went home without her, and she was walking briskly along alone, tramping hardily through the snow late that afternoon, when Jack Welles overtook her.

"How's the soup?" he asked cheerfully, that being a stock question of his ever since the fateful Institute dinner.

"How's the Student Council?" asked Rosemary.

Jack's open face changed.

"What do you know about the Student Council?" he said gruffly.

"Oh, I heard—something," replied Rosemary. "Was Frank Fenton unfair, Jack?"

"Well, he doesn't think so," said Jack, "I suppose you girls have been gossiping and you might as well get the story straight," he added.

Rosemary nodded eagerly.

"I hope the Gray boys and the others will shovel snow," she cried impulsively. "I don't give a fig for the old dramatic fund, Jack."

"I do," said Jack. "It's all right to turn the snow money into the fund and I've nothing to say against that. But when the Student Council kicks because five boys out of forty-eight want to keep what they earn, and they know they are putting themselves through school, I think it shows a contemptible, small spirit and I told Frank so to-night. You see, Rosemary," he went on a little more calmly, "there aren't a whole lot of ways a boy can earn money and go to school in a small town like this—nearly everyone tends to his own fires and sweeps off his own walks and runs his own errands. If we hadn't had one snow storm after another, there wouldn't have been this chance. And I purposely appointed these five boys because I know what they are up against. And by gum," he said forcibly if inelegantly, "on my squad they stay!"

"But can't the Student Council make you back down and appoint others?" asked Rosemary, glowing with excitement. "I thought the S. C. could do anything in high school, Jack."

"They are pretty powerful," her companion

admitted, "but they don't dare carry this to the faculty, because they'll look so small and Eustice Gray is in the direct line for one of the college scholarships. Every teacher on the faculty staff will stand by the boys—they're all fine students and making a stiff fight to get through school. You don't suppose Mr. Hamlin is going to think the dramatic fund is more important than shoes for Norman Cox, do you?"

Mr. Hamlin was the principal of the high school.

"But it can't be very pleasant for the boys," urged Rosemary, troubled.

"You've said it," confessed Jack gloomily. "I had a second fight there, for after the fellows heard the Student Council was raising a rumpus, they said they would get off my team and let others take their places. Norman said he guessed they could get independent jobs shoveling snow after school hours."

"Could they?" asked Rosemary.

"I suppose they could, but they won't if I have anything to say about it," declared Jack with what Doctor Hugh called his "bull-dog" expression. "I was told to appoint a snow cleaning team and I've done it, and by gum my nominations stand. If the Student Council doesn't

like 'em, they can appeal to the faculty—and they'll get what's coming to them! The town Council doesn't give a hoot where the money goes, all they want is to have the snow cleaned away. I told the fellows if they walked out, they made me just five short, for I wouldn't appoint anyone in their places. If they want to see the Sophomore class fall down on the job, all right. You watch my twelve names go through!"

Rosemary watched. So did all the high and half the grammar school, for word of the dispute, variously colored to suit different informants, had been noised around and the only persons in actual ignorance of the state of affairs were the high school faculty. The Student Council was desperately anxious that they should remain in that state, for there had been one or two previous clashes over the relative importance of the dramatic fund, and the members of the council had no wish to be accused of "forcing" any unfair demands. So, as Jack had foreseen, his nominations were allowed to stand and the next afternoon, forty-eight laughing, shouting boys reported to Bill McCormack, bluff and kindly member of the Eastshore Common Council who would, in a larger municipality, have been called "Streets and Highways Commis-

sioner" or by similar sonorous title.

But before the boys met "Bill" in front of the town hall, the president of the Student Council, Frank Fenton, and Will Mears, president of the Junior class, had held a conference with Mr. Edmonds, the most influential member, some said, next to the president, Cameron Jordan, a cousin of the old and respected physician. The result of this conference was that Bill McCormack held in his fat, red hands a sheaf of papers which allotted the streets to the four classes and took the decision quite away from him.

"I was told to give these papers to the heads of the gangs," said Mr. McCormack, smiling expansively. "Here ye are—Senor, Junior, Sophomore, Freshman—them's your working papers, me lads, and now off with ye; the shovels ye'll be finding in the basement of the hall."

Jack Welles glanced at the slip of paper handed him, folded it up and stuffed it in his pocket. As soon as his "gang" was fitted out with snow shovels, he marched them away in the wake of one of the lumbering wagons that was to carry the snow off to a vacant field on the outskirts of the town.

"What did we draw, Jack?" asked Norman Cox curiously.

"Plummers Lane," said Jack laconically.

Plummers Lane, was the nearest approach to a "slumming section" that Eastshore possessed. The idle, the shiftless and the vicious congregated there, living in tumbled down shacks in the winter and the middle of the streets, in summer. There were two factories, one a novelty works, the other a canning and candy factory and the "dump lot" bounded the Lane on the north and the jail on the south. Altogether it was not the choicest portion which could fall to the lot of the young snow cleaners.

"It's enough to make you want to resign from the dramatic club!" exclaimed Kenneth Vail, who, in common with the other boys, labored under no delusion that chance fortune had sent them to Plummers Lane.

"If you had only put some one else in my place—" began Eustice Gray uncomfortably, but seven voices immediately shouted to him, in friendly chorus to "dry up."

"We'll make Plummers Lane look sick," declared Jack. "From the looks of it, I don't think there's been a shovel down here since the first snow. If the S. C. thinks they have marked more off for us than we can clean up, we'll show

them! Here goes for the first shovel—out of the way, Mike!"

The grinning driver reined in his team and dodged as Jack hurled a heavy shovelful over the side of the cart. The other boys followed suit and twelve strong, sturdy backs bent to their task. The population of Plummers Lane, that part of it visible by day, draped itself along the curb to watch operations and hand out advice, but any more practical help was not offered or expected.

CHAPTER XX

DRESSMAKER ROSEMARY

"I'M an old man," announced Jack Welles that night, dropping into a chair in Doctor Hugh's office, while he waited for the latter to prepare a bottle of medicine for his father's cough.

"Back broken, I suppose?" suggested the doctor cheerfully. "The first ten years are always the hardest, my boy."

Jack groaned and Rosemary, patiently holding a bleary-eyed cat for Sarah, looked at him anxiously.

"Ten years!" complained Jack. "Another afternoon like this and I won't live to see ten years. Ye gods, who would have thought a little snow shoveling could break me up like this!"

"You're out of practice," replied the doctor, busily writing a label. "Don't try to clean all the streets in one day, Jack; I came through Main street to-night and I must say the boys have made a good job of it, though, of course, it was

fairly well tramped down. It's the side streets that are blocked. Where are you working?"

"Plummers Lane," said Jack dryly. "The Juniors have uptown and Main street. We're providing a side show for the unemployed and if we don't get any fun out of our job, they at least can laugh their heads off."

"I told Hugh about the Student Council and the way they acted," said Rosemary hotly. "Don't you think they are too hateful for anything, Hugh?"

The doctor looked at Jack who managed a grin.

"Jack isn't hurt yet," said Doctor Hugh, smiling, "and I don't know but digging out Plummers Lane is a man-sized job and one to be proud of. Certainly if you get the streets in passable condition so that we don't have to carry a sick woman through snow drifts to get her to the ambulance—which happened last week—you'll have the thanks of the doctors if not of the Student Council."

"We're going to stick," declared Jack, taking the bottle the doctor held out to him. "If there should ever be a fire down there, with the snow piled over the hydrants and kerosene oil cans mixed up with packing boxes and kindling wood

in the front yards, after the happy-go-lucky housekeeping methods followed by Plummers Lane housekeepers, I should say three blocks would go like tinder. Bill McCormack was down to see us, just as we were knocking off, and he was pleased as Punch at what we'd done."

"I'm coming down to see you," announced Rosemary.

"So 'm I," cried Sarah. "I can shovel snow, too."

"Come on, if you want to," said Jack, "but don't expect us to have much time to talk to you. We're being paid by the hour and business is business."

He went off whistling, leaving Rosemary with an odd expression on her face. It was the first time Jack had ever hinted he could possibly be too busy to talk to her.

"Hugh," she said seriously, when the doctor had prescribed for Sarah's sick pussy cat and the anxious mistress had gone off to tuck the patient in bed down cellar. "Hugh, couldn't I take hot coffee and doughnuts to the boys while they are working in the snow afternoons? I know they must get hungry and it is so cold and windy down Plummers Lane—the wind comes across the marsh."

"Go ahead," her brother encouraged her. "Get Sarah to help you. I imagine Jack is having a tough time and he'll appreciate a little unspoken sympathy. I'll give you a testimonial for your coffee, Rosemary, if you think you need one; where are the doughnuts coming from?"

"They're all made, a stone crock full," dimpled Rosemary. "That was what made me think of doing it. We'll come home from school and get the big tin pail with the lid and a pan of doughnuts. But I can't carry twelve cups."

"Paper ones will do," the doctor assured her. "The boys will gulp the coffee before it can possibly seep through. Make Sarah do her share, and don't stay late, either one of you."

The next afternoon, as Jack straightened his aching back to answer the questions of Frank Fenton, who was serving as time-keeper for the four squads, he looked across the street and saw two little figures who waved gloved hands at him and beckoned in a mysterious manner.

"Isn't that Rosemary Willis?" asked Frank, "stunning kid, isn't she?"

Rosemary, rosy from the cold and with her eyes dark and starry, left Sarah on the curb and crossed over.

"Oh, Jack," she began before she reached him,

"Sarah and I have brought you some hot coffee and doughnuts. There's enough for everyone."

Frank had his data, but he still lingered, and the other boys at Jack's shout, crowded around. Rosemary knew most of them and Jack hurriedly performed the few necessary introductions leaving Frank till the last. Norman Cox and Eustice Gray had hastened across the street and returned with Sarah and the supplies just as Jack said, "Rosemary, this is Frank Fenton."

"He can't have any," said Sarah with blunt distinctness.

Rosemary flushed scarlet and then, with the quickness characteristic of her, jerked the lid from the coffee can and filled one of the paper cups with the steamy, fragrant, liquid.

"Please," she said gravely, holding it out to the astonished president of the Student Council. "The sugar and cream are already in. And these are fresh doughnuts."

Mechanically Frank drank the hot coffee and ate a doughnut, while Rosemary poured out the remainder of the coffee and Jack passed the cups around, Sarah serving the doughnuts.

"That is the best coffee I ever drank," declared Frank, when he had finished. "And now, couldn't I take you home? I have my car down

the street a ways and I go right past your house."

Jack choked over his coffee, but Rosemary thanked the senior politely and said that she and Sarah had planned to stay and watch the shovelers a while.

"This isn't a very nice neighborhood, especially after dark you know," said Frank.

"We're not going to stay long," Rosemary was beginning, but Jack cut her short.

"I live next door to Rosemary, and I'll see that she and Sarah get home all right," he said brusquely. "I know all about Plummers Lane, too, Frank."

The Student Council president lifted his cap and went back to his car.

"I don't like him," said Sarah decidedly.

"I shouldn't wonder if he was faintly aware of your dislike," grinned Jack. "Any more coffee left, Rosemary? You certainly had a bright idea when you thought of this."

Rosemary and Sarah were more than repaid for their long, cold walk, by the evident pleasure the boys took in their warm drink and the two fat doughnuts apiece they had brought them. They knocked off work fifteen or twenty minutes earlier in order to see the girls home before dark, but the next afternoon the doctor's car

came and picked up the sisters and the empty coffee can so that the workers lost no time.

For nearly a week, the boys shoveled steadily after school hours, sticking to the job long after the first novelty had worn away. Bill McCormack declared that they were the best "gang" he had ever hired and the Plummers Lane residents ceased to regard them as a joke and began to exchange sociable comments and quips with them, though never descending to the plane of familiarity that included a shovel. Rosemary and Sarah, and now and then Shirley, carried coffee and doughnuts, or hot cocoa and cakes, each afternoon and Doctor Hugh willingly stopped for them in his car. Even the weather ceased to consent to co-operate for after one heavy snow, it cleared and the streets made passable, remained that way till after Christmas.

The most important subject of discussion in the Willis household, along the lines of Christmas preparations, was the box to be sent the little mother in the sanatorium.

"I think we ought to make her something!" announced Rosemary.

"Well, what?" asked Sarah. "I most know she'd love to have one of Tootles' kittens, but

I don't suppose we could mail that, could we?"

"Praise be, you can't," said Winnie who had overheard. "Those kittens will be the death of me yet, and what they'd do to sick folks in a sanatorium, I'm sure I don't know and don't want to."

"What'll we make Mother?" urged Shirley, pulling Rosemary's belt.

"I know—a kimona," said Rosemary triumphantly. "That won't be hard, because we'll have only two seams. Mother will love to have something we made her, instead of a gift we just went down town and bought. What color do you think would be pretty, Sarah?"

"Red," said Sarah promptly.

"Pink," begged Shirley. "Make it pink, Rosemary.

"I like blue," said Rosemary wistfully.

"Let's ask Aunt Trudy," suggested Sarah.

"I think you're awfully foolish to try to make anything," pronounced Aunt Trudy when they consulted her. "But I suppose, if you have set your hearts on it, why nothing will dissuade you. Why don't you make your mother a white kimona, and bind it with pink ribbon? White was always her favorite."

So it was decided the kimona should be white

eiderdown and bound with pink satin ribbon and Rosemary and Sarah and Shirley went shopping one afternoon after school and bought the materials. Their purchase included a pattern, the first in their joint experience and when they had spread it out on Rosemary's bed the three girls looked at it helplessly.

"We'll put it on paper, till we learn how to cut it," said Rosemary, secretly wondering how anyone ever learned to understand such complicated directions as were printed on the pattern envelope.

They had decided that neither Aunt Trudy nor Winnie could be allowed to help them and since Rosemary had a working knowledge of the sewing machine's mysteries and could sew neatly by hand, they had not anticipated any trouble.

"But how could we know a pattern was such a silly thing?" wailed Rosemary, tired and cross when the dinner gong sounded and they had made no progress. The floor of the room was littered with paper and the top of the bed resembled a pincushion for Shirley had amused herself by sticking the contents of the entire paper of pins in orderly rows on the counterpane.

"Aren't you coming down to dinner?" asked Sarah, moving toward the door.

"No, I'm not," retorted Rosemary. "I'm not hungry and I don't want anything to eat. Don't let Winnie come up here making a fuss; you tell Aunt Trudy I don't want any dinner tonight. I'm not going to do a thing till I get this kimona cut out."

"Hugh will be mad," said Sarah, half way down the hall.

"Let him," called Rosemary recklessly, shutting the door of her room with a bang.

She was deep in the pattern directions for the tenth time, when someone rapped on her door.

"I'm not hungry—don't bother me," she called, frowning.

The door knob turned and Doctor Hugh smiled in at her.

"Heard you were having trouble with the dressmaking," he announced. "Can't I help? I'm not Winnie or Aunt Trudy, you know. I'd like to have a finger in this, if I could."

Rosemary drew a long breath.

"You do understand, don't you?" she said, standing on the foot that had not gone to sleep and trying to rouse the circulation in the other one. "We didn't want anyone to touch our present for Mother, except us; but you're us, too, aren't you?"

"Surest thing," agreed the doctor, approaching the terrible pattern with grave interest. "What's the matter with this—aren't you sure how it should be cut?"

Rosemary shook her head hopelessly.

"I'm afraid to cut it before I know and I've tried it every way I can think of," she confessed.

"Well, if this is wrong, I'll buy you some more goods to-morrow," promised the doctor, twitching the pattern to his liking.

He took up the scissors and cut around the outline with what seemed to Rosemary, reckless abandon. But when he had finished and she took up the two pieces, they fitted together like parts of a picture puzzle.

"It's right!" she cried in delight. "Hugh, you darling, it's all right! And I can baste it to-night and sew it on the machine to-morrow and put the ribbon on by hand. Won't Mother love it!"

"No more sewing to-night," said her brother firmly. "Dressmakers always make mistakes when they're tired. Come down and eat your dinner now, and then put this truck away till after school to-morrow afternoon."

Rosemary followed him downstairs meekly, though her fingers itched to get at the basting.

Sarah looked up at them in surprise as they entered the dining-room.

"I thought Rosemary was going to be cross!" she said frankly.

"You were mistaken," retorted Doctor Hugh, smiling so infectiously at Rosemary that she could do no less than twinkle back at him.

CHAPTER XXI

MR. JORDAN LEARNS SOMETHING

THE kimono was finished without further mishap and packed away in the Christmas box.

"And no one was more surprised than I when the thing proved to be cut right," Doctor Hugh confided to Winnie. "I never looked at a pattern before, but I took a chance. I could see Rosemary was just on the edge of 'nerves' and I figured out that if I did make a mess of it, she might not find it out till the next day, and by that time she might be able to see the humor in the situation."

"You're a wise lad, Hughie, and I'm proud of you," said Winnie fondly. She had guessed something of the cost of the fur lined coat that the doctor had proudly displayed as his Christmas gift for the little mother, now well enough to take short tramps through the pine woods daily. Winnie did not know that a set of sorely needed medical books had gone into the coat, but she suspected something of the kind.

The box was packed and sent and the Willis family settled down to the first Christmas they had known without the gentle spirit who had tirelessly planned for every holiday. But they had the dear knowledge that she was coming home again to them, well and strong, and they hung the wreaths in the windows and wound greens about the lights and trimmed a tree for Shirley with thankful and merry hearts. Doctor Hugh had missed so many home Christmas Days that he in particular, enjoyed the preparations and his attempts at secrets and his insistence on tasting all of Winnie's dishes drove the girls into fits of laughter. A pile of packages surrounded every place on Christmas morning and there was something pretty and practical and purely nonsensical for each one from the doctor. He, in turn, declared that for once in his life he had everything he wanted. Aunt Trudy's gift to her nephew and each of her nieces was a cheque and the announcements that followed were characteristic.

"What are you going to get, Hugh?" asked Sarah curiously, when the nature of her slip of paper had been explained to her.

"Books," said Doctor Hugh, promptly, smiling at his aunt.

"Music and a new music case, a leather one," declared Rosemary, her eyes shining.

"I'd like to buy a dog," said Sarah, and grinned good-naturedly at the groan which greeted her modest wish.

"You'd better buy an electric heater for the cats," suggested Winnie. "I'm forever taking 'em out of the oven; some day I'll forget to look, and there will be baked cats when you come down."

Shirley was distressed at this dismal prediction, but Sarah did not take it to heart.

"I think, after all," she said meditatively, "I'll buy a hen and keep chickens."

"What are you going to buy with your money, Shirley lamb?" asked Rosemary, as Sarah fell to planning a chicken yard.

"A doll I guess," said Shirley who had had three that morning.

When Sarah reminded her of that fact, Aunt Trudy protested.

"No one is to attempt to dictate in any way," she said with unaccustomed firmness. "When I was a child I was never allowed to spend a cent as I wanted to and I gave you each this money to do with exactly as you please. If you spend it foolishly, all right, I don't care. But I want

each one of you to get what you want, whether or not it pleases some one else. I could have bought you what I thought you ought to have, but that's the kind of presents I had as a child and the only kind. And my goodness, didn't I hate 'em!"

The girls stared a little at this outburst and then the doctor laughed.

"Well all I can say," he remarked drolly as he pushed back his chair in answer to the summons of the telephone, "is that it is lucky Christmas comes only once a year. Otherwise, Aunt Trudy, you'd have us completely demoralized."

Spending their Christmas money gave the three girls a good deal of pleasure during holiday week and a letter from their mother was another pleasant incident. Mrs. Willis wrote that the fur coat and the kimona had made her the envy of the whole sanatorium and she was so proud of them both that she cried whenever she looked at them!

"—But, of course, I know you don't want me to do that, so I have stopped, really I have," ran one paragraph of her letter. "I am so proud of you all, my darlings and it seems such a short time ago that you were all babies. How could I look ahead and see that my son would grow up

so soon and buy his mother a fur-lined coat, or that my three girl babies for whom I sewed so happily would make me a kimona and such a beautiful garment? I am wearing it now. . . ."

The clear cold weather came to an end during holiday week and a heavy storm set in a few days before New Year's. For two days and a night it snowed steadily and Sarah was almost beside herself to think that now she could play in the snow as long as she liked with no school to interfere. Shirley suffered from cold and did not like to play out long at a time, but Rosemary was not too old to enjoy snow ball fights and coasting and she joined Sarah on the hill as often as she felt she could leave her beloved practising. Nina Edmonds did not care for coasting, but Fannie Mears and several of the girls in the grade above the seventh liked to coast on Fred Mears' bob-sled.

Late in the afternoon of the second day, when the snow had almost stopped, except for a few large flakes, Rosemary set out to find Sarah and bring her in in time for dinner. She was ploughing along through the snow when Jack Welles hailed her.

"'Lo, Rosemary!" he called. "Where you going—home?"

"I'm going to the hill to get Sarah," Rosemary explained. "Hugh says she'd coast till breakfast time if no one stopped her and I believe she would. Where's your sled? Haven't you been out to-day? They say the coasting is fine."

"I know it is, but I haven't had time to try it, worse luck!" growled Jack, falling into step beside Rosemary as they walked on. "The Common Council has sent out a call for the snow cleaning gangs again and I've been trying to round the fellows up."

"Yes, I suppose the streets are piled up," agreed Rosemary. "When are you expected to start work—not to-night?"

"To-morrow morning," the boy replied. "But there won't be more than six of us."

"Six!" repeated Rosemary in astonishment. "Why I thought there were twelve in each gang."

"There were," said Jack briefly. "But, you see, it is holiday week, and no one wants to work. The only five I can get are Norman Cox, Eustice Gray, Jerry and Fred Gordon and Ben Kelsey. I'm the sixth. Two of the others are away and the rest are going on a sleighing trip up to the woods."

"Where's Frank Fenton?" demanded Rosemary. "Can't he make 'em work?"

"Oh, he's going on the ride, too," explained

Jack. "A bunch are going, girls and boys and three of the teachers will chaperone. They go up to a camp, you know, and build a big fire and dance and have a good time. Frank says it won't hurt to wait a day or two. I think he's hoping the snow will melt."

"What about the dramatic fund?" inquired, Rosemary, not intentionally sarcastic. "I thought they wanted the money."

"Too soon after Christmas," grinned Jack. "No, I guess the six of us will have to represent the school. Is that Sarah over there with the red hat?"

"Yes, it is," answered Rosemary, beckoning to her sister. "Didn't you want to go on the ride, Jack? Or the other boys?"

"Well I don't care so much," replied Jack slowly. "Of course I'd have a good time, but I can live without a sleigh ride. I'm sorry on the fellows' account though—they wanted to go with some girls and they don't have much fun. I hated like time to ask them to come and shovel snow to-morrow morning. As Eustice says most of the school fun costs too much for him, but this wasn't giong to be expensive."

"Couldn't you wait just one day?" suggested Rosemary.

Jack shook his head.

"It's understood that we stand ready to help the Council out," he said in a business-like manner. "They depend on us, and it isn't their fault the snow came during the holidays. We were glad enough to get the chance before and I think it looks mighty cheap to try to beg off now just because it isn't convenient to work. I'm going to be on deck to-morrow morning if I'm the only one who turns up."

Six boys, however, reported the next morning to Bill McCormack and at their own suggestion, were set to work clearing the Plummers Lane section of the accumulated snow.

"My father is always talking about the fire risk down here," said Jack to Jerry Gordon as they shoveled side by side. "Eastshore has a nifty little fire department I'm ready to admit, but it can't climb a snow bank even with the new chemical engine."

The boys found the day unexpectedly long. Hitherto they had worked three or four hours after school and the one Saturday they had shoveled had been at the end of their task so that they had been able to quit at noon. But, although they were genuinely tired long before night—and the noon rest had never been so ap-

preciated!—not one of them suggested giving in or knocking off an hour or two earlier. They worked so steadily and to such good purpose that by half-past four, when Rosemary and Sarah appeared with hot coffee and sandwiches, the most congested area in Plummers Lane was comparatively clear.

"Gee, Rosemary, you certainly are all right!" approved Jack as he held the can for her while she ladled out coffee. "I never was so hungry in my life."

"They're chicken sandwiches and turkey, too," said Rosemary, smiling. "Winnie said if you couldn't go on the sleigh ride she'd see to it that you had something extra good to eat."

The hungry boys fell upon Winnie's sandwiches with a vigor that would have done her heart good, and the coffee disappeared magically. When the last drop was gone and the last crumb vanished, Jack insisted that the girls start for home.

"It's getting dark now," he said, "and Hugh won't like it if you are out late down here. I'd walk home with you, but we want to finish; we're not going to quit till we get to the end of the street. There's a fire hydrant there."

Rosemary and Sarah, carrying the empty coffee can and the basket that had been packed with sandwiches, walked slowly toward home, Sarah audibly regretting that they had left the sled at the house.

"We could have a good coast, before dinner," she argued, walking backward, an accomplishment of which she was exceedingly proud.

Pride, as often happens, went before a fall, in this instance, a collision. Sarah, heedless of Rosemary's cry of warning, walked into a stout, silver-haired gentleman in a fur-collared coat.

"Bless my soul, what's this?" he asked in astonishment, looking down at the small girl who had bumped into his knees.

"How do you do Mr. Jordan?" said Rosemary respectfully, recognizing the president of the Common Council.

"Why it's Rosemary Willis!" beamed Mr. Jordan. "And Sarah, as I live. Where are you going my dears?"

"We're going home," explained Rosemary. "We took the boys some coffee and sandwiches. They are shoveling snow, you know."

"Oh, the high school lads, yes, I recollect," said Mr. Jordan. "I meant to go around and

see them at work, but I've spent the afternoon in the library. Pretty faithful lads, aren't they, to stick to their job in holiday week?"

Rosemary held an instant's swift debate with herself. Jack, she knew, would hold his tongue. But Jack was not within hearing distance and his scruples did not honestly affect her. She put down the coffee can and began to speak. She told Mr. Jordan the whole story, from the beginning when the Student Council had objected to Jack's list of workers. She told about the streets assigned to the boys. She mentioned the sleigh ride and told who had gone. She named the six boys who had spent the day shoveling. The faster she talked, the prettier and more earnest she looked and the more interested Mr. Jordan seemed. Sarah listened dumbly, fascinated by her sister's eloquence.

Mr. Jordan walked with them to their front steps and shook hands with them both.

"I am extremely obliged to you," he told Rosemary as he lifted his hat to go. "I find that I have been a little out of things and you have set me right."

"Goodness knows what I've done," said Rosemary to Sarah as they brushed their hair and made ready for the table. "Don't you say a

word to Jack—he will be furious. But I don't care what happens, I'm glad I said what I did; this 'silence is golden' is a silly saying, I think."

Late that night, when every one had gone to bed, the fire whistle sounded. Rosemary raised up in bed, shivering with excitement. She counted the strokes. One-two—one-two—one-two-three-four. Reaching for her dressing gown at the foot of the bed, she seized it and rushed for the door. Sarah's door opened at the same moment and the two little figures met in the hall. They shouted together, rousing the household.

"Plummers Lane!" they shrieked. "The fire's in Plummers Lane!"

CHAPTER XXII

SHOPPING WITH NINA

SHIRLEY, half-awake and crying, came pattering out into the hall and Winnie dashed from her room. On the second floor, Aunt Trudy scuttled back and forth demanding where the fire was.

"Go to bed girls," ordered Doctor Hugh, who had just come in and was fully dressed. "Go back to bed, and I'll tell you all about the fire in the morning."

"Oh, Hugh, are you going? Wait for me, please?" cried Rosemary. "I won't be a minute."

"Me, too," shouted Sarah. "Wait for me, Hugh."

He was already in the lower hall, struggling into his overcoat.

"Go back to bed, and don't be silly," was his parting injunction as he opened the door. "You'll catch cold, running through the halls. Send 'em to bed, Winnie."

The door banged behind him and they heard a familiar whistle.

"Hugh!" some one called. "Hugh, it's down Plummers Lane. Going to get the car out? I'll help you."

"That's Jack," cried Rosemary, trying to see through the white curtains without being seen. "Oh, dear, men have all the fun!"

In spite of Winnie's remonstrances and Aunt Trudy's worry that they would have pneumonia, the three girls tried to stay up till their brother came back. After half an hour they gave up and went sleepily to bed. The next morning they heard that the fire had been in one of the novelty factories and that several houses had also been destroyed.

"If the hydrants hadn't been open and the street clear, they say the whole block would have gone," the doctor reported. "In some way it's got over town that Jack and his gang were the only high school boys on the job yesterday and that they voluntarily cleaned the snow out of Wycliffe street. The Common Council is talking of doing something handsome to show their appreciation."

Rosemary beamed, but Sarah who never could keep still blurted out the truth.

"Rosemary told Mr. Jordan last night," she said matter-of-factly.

When Doctor Hugh had heard the details, he declared that while Jack might not approve at once, he was sure he would later be glad.

"You're a loyal friend, Rosemary," said the doctor patting the gold-red hair now long enough to tie back in a thick bunch of curls again, "and there are few finer qualities to possess than that."

The Common Council, through Mr. Jordan passed a resolution thanking the boys, by name, for their faithful "and valuable" services, and the resolution was printed in the Eastshore "Chronicle" much to the confusion of the lads and the delight and pride of their admiring families. The Council also voted each boy the sum of $25, not, Mr. Jordan explained, as an attempt to pay them, but in recognition of "the devotion to duty which is able to ignore personal pleasure and the initiative which is directed by common sense."

"Incidentally," he added, "the property, saved because the street was clear and the fire apparatus could get through, totals considerable more than the sum we are voting you."

Jack learned, of course, of the part Rosemary

had played in this train of events and though he made several cutting remarks about the inability of girls to hold their tongues, he gradually, if grudgingly, admitted that "it might have been worse."

"Norman Cox and Eustice Gray and the others are tickled pink with the $25," he confided. "They think you are great. And I suppose you couldn't help spilling the beans to Mr. Jordan."

But Rosemary was content to do without pæans of praise.

The famous "January thaw" filled the streets with slush a few weeks later and made indoors a pleasant place to stay. Fannie Mears caught a heavy cold and was out of school a week and Nina Edmonds began to seek the society of Rosemary, whom she had rather neglected.

"You never come to my house any more," said Nina, one noon period. "Come home with me this afternoon, won't you, dear?"

Rosemary was acutely conscious of her brother's wishes concerning Nina, and she knew that he preferred she did not go often to the Edmond's handsome home.

"Well at least come shopping with me," sug-

gested Nina, noticing the younger girl's hesitation. "Go uptown after school this afternoon, please, Rosemary?"

"Aunt Trudy expects me home," said Rosemary doubtfully.

"For goodness sake, do you have to go straight home from school every day?" demanded Nina fretfully. "Why any one would think you were Shirley's age! Can't Sarah tell your aunt you won't be home?"

"I suppose she could," admitted Rosemary. "All right, Nina, I'll go with you."

Sarah accepted the message reluctantly after school that afternoon and she and Shirley went home while Nina and Rosemary hurried off up town. Nina's shopping manners were remarkably like her mother's and she was respectfully treated in all the shops. Eastshore had no very large stores, but the merchandise was of the better grade in even the tiny places, the lack of variety, as in many small towns, being balanced by uniform quality.

"Charge it," said Nina airily, flitting from shop to shop and counter to counter.

It was dark, almost before they knew it and though Nina was insistent that Rosemary come

home to dinner with her, Rosemary refused. No, she must go home.

"Well, here's your parcel," said Nina good-naturedly. "You'll love 'em when you get used to them and you look perfectly stunning in them, you know you do."

Rosemary tucked the brown paper package under her arm and fled up the street, dashing up the front steps behind a tall figure just putting a key in the Willis front door.

"Well, honey, why this haste?" demanded the doctor, stepping back to let her go in first. "You didn't smell Winnie's apple pudding a block away, did you?"

"Where have you been, Rosemary?" asked Aunt Trudy, coming into the hall. "Sarah said you said you would be home by half-past four."

"What you got?" inquired Sarah, eyeing the parcel under Rosemary's arm with frank curiosity.

"Let me open it, Rosemary?" begged Shirley, standing on tip-toe to pinch the package, her usual method of guessing the contents.

"There isn't a speck of privacy in the house!" flared Rosemary. "I think I might buy some-

thing once in a while that the whole family didn't have to see. And no one has to come straight home from school, except me. If I'm an hour late, Aunt Trudy always wants to know where I've been."

"I told her you went shopping with Nina Edmonds," remarked Sarah sweetly, "And you're always cross when you go anywhere with her."

"Sarah!" said Doctor Hugh, warningly, but Rosemary dashed past them and up the stairs to her own room.

She thrust the package down deep in her cedar chest and there it stayed till the next Saturday afternoon. Then Rosemary deliberately locked her door and proceeded to array herself in gray silk stockings and patent leather pumps with narrow, high heels, the results of Nina Edmonds' persuasive arguments and Rosemary's deep longing to possess these accessories.

Walking in the pumps proved to be unexpectedly difficult, but Rosemary practised while she dressed and by the time she had put on her best hat and coat and was ready to go down stairs she was able to manage them better. Sarah and Shirley had gone to the library, Winnie was busy in the kitchen and Aunt Trudy was

sewing in her room. Rosemary counted on leaving the house unobserved. She teetered to the door of her aunt's room and carefully keeping out of her range of vision announced that she was going up town for a little walk.

"All right, dearie, have a nice time," answered Aunt Trudy, rocking placidly. "Tell Winnie to answer the telephone if it rings, because I don't want to have to go down stairs."

Rosemary experimented cautiously with the top step and then discretion prompted her to abandon valor. In her best coat and hat and gorgeously arrayed as to her pretty feet, she, who considered herself quite grown up this afternoon, quietly slid down the banister! Just as she reached the newel post the door opened. There stood Doctor Hugh!

"Haven't forgotten how, have you?" he said, laughing. "That was neatly done, dear. I saw you through the glass before I opened the door."

Rosemary was painfully conscious of her shoes. Against her will, her glance straycd down and the doctor's eyes followed hers.

"Why how fine we are!" he said.

Rosemary sat down on the last step and tried to pull her skirt down over her feet.

"I know you don't like them, Hugh," she answered resentfully, "but I don't see why I can't wear high heels when I'm dressed up. All the girls do."

"They are very pretty shoes," said the doctor gravely. "And very unsuitable for a walk on a cold, slushy winter day," he added.

Rosemary said nothing.

"I suppose you wheedled Aunt Trudy into letting you buy them," commented her brother presently. "Well, dear, there are some things we won't learn except through experience. I'm disappointed that Mother's wishes didn't have more weight with you."

Rosemary half expected him to forbid her to leave the house wearing the new shoes, but he went on to his office without another word. She opened the front door noiselessly and hastened uptown to meet Nina Edmonds.

Walking was not the unconscious, easy swing that Rosemary was accustomed to, in the patent leather footgear and it was simply impossible for her to forget her feet for one instant. Nina was bent on more shopping and Rosemary found it very tiresome to stand before the counters and look at things she knew Nina did not mean to buy. Finally the latter suggested that they go

to the little tea room recently opened and have tea. The prospect of being able to sit down delighted poor Rosemary.

They had to cross the street and the tracks of the Interurban trolley to reach the tea room and in crossing one of Rosemary's high heels caught in the trolley rail.

"I can't get it out!" she cried, snatching off her glove and working frantically at the shoe.

"Work your foot back and forth," advised Nina. "Oh, goodness, people are stopping to look at you."

Sure enough, the Saturday afternoon shoppers, a larger crowd than usual for many farmers drove in on the last day of the week to make their purchases, were beginning to be attracted by the sight of the two girls on the trolley tracks.

"How could you be so silly!" cried Nina in vexation. "Look at all the rubes—if there is anything I detest, it is to be made conspicuous."

Rosemary flushed angrily, but a sudden shout drowned her reply.

"Car coming!" cried a man on the curb. "Somebody flag the trolley!"

The Interurban cars operated at a high rate of speed, even through the town, and as the wires started their humming, Rosemary and Nina

glanced up and saw a car bearing down on them.

"You'll be killed!" shrieked Nina, taking a flying leap that landed her safely across the tracks.

A man shot out of the crowd toward Rosemary and another dashed up the street in the direction of the trolley, waving his cap. The motorman put on the brakes, there was an ear-splitting noise as the wheels locked and slid and the car stopped a good ten feet from the frightened girl. Meanwhile the man who had come to her rescue had unbuttoned the straps of the pump and pulled Rosemary free from her shoe.

"Fool heels!" he commented, while a crowd of the curious surged out from the curb. "If I had my way no girl should ever own a pair. Here, I'll get it out for you—"

He tugged at the obstinate pump, the heel gave way and the man fell back, the shoe in his hand, the heel neatly ripped off.

"Oh, say, I'm sorry!" he stammered. "I didn't mean to tear it off—here's the heel; I guess a shoemaker can put it on again for you."

He handed her the pump and the heel and the motorman and conductor went back to their trolley.

"Thank you very much—it doesn't matter about the heel, it really doesn't matter at all," said Rosemary incoherently, her one wish being to get away from this awful crowd.

"If you're looking for the girl who was with you, she's gone," volunteered a freckle faced boy. "I saw her streaking it up the street as soon as the trolley stopped."

Getting home with one heel off and one heel on, was not an easy matter, but Rosemary managed it. Half an hour later, Doctor Hugh reading at his desk, was astonished to have two patent leather pumps flung down on the book before him and to see Rosemary, crimson-cheeked and stormy-eyed confronting him.

CHAPTER XXIII

SARAH LOSES A MENAGERIE

"YOU may burn them up or give them away or sell them!" Rosemary cried. "I never want to see a pair of high-heeled shoes again as long as I live. I despise them!"

The doctor picked up the offending little shoes and eyed them critically.

"Wait," said Rosemary as he seemed about to speak. "I have something to tell you, Hugh. I've been as bad as I could be, and I've done everything you didn't like. But you'll be glad, because I never want to see Nina Edmonds again. I never want any one to mention her name to me."

Her voice was hard and unnatural.

"Hadn't you better sit down, dear?" Doctor Hugh suggested. "I'm sorry if you and Nina have quarreled."

"Oh, we haven't quarreled," said Rosemary bitterly. "I can't tell you about it, Hugh, but she isn't the kind of girl I thought she was.

And I did like her so! I won't cry," she added doggedly. "I haven't told you the worst yet. Hugh, you thought I persuaded Aunt Trudy to buy me the pumps, but she didn't know anything about it; I had them charged on Nina's account at the Quality shoe store. And I owe Nina $12.98 this minute and I have to pay her right away. I can't owe it to her another day. Will you lend me the money? I don't care what you do to me, or how you punish me, but don't make me stay in debt. I can't stand it."

Doctor Hugh put his hand in his pocket and pulled out his wallet. He counted out several bills and gave them to Rosemary.

"Don't you want to tell me about it, dear?" he said quietly. "I can not bear to see you hurt and not to know the reason. Perhaps I can set it right for you."

Rosemary shook her head.

"Nobody can help," she said despondently. "There's nothing to help." Her lips quivered. "I thought Nina was different," she said, and then the tears overflowed.

The doctor had seen Rosemary cry before, but never like this. As he held her in his arms and she sobbed out the hurt and humiliation of the afternoon against his shoulder, he wondered

what had happened to shake her so. He did not know that she had had her first experience with disloyalty or that her first broken friendship was teaching her a hard lesson. By and by the passion of weeping grew quieter and Rosemary fumbled for her handkerchief.

"I didn't know I was going to be so silly," she said, sitting up and trying to smile as the doctor tucked his own clean handkerchief into her hand.

"You won't tell me what is troubling you?" he said persuasively.

"I can't, Hugh," Rosemary answered, her tear drenched eyes meeting his gaze squarely. "I can't talk about it, not even to you."

"All right, dear, if that's the way you feel," he said instantly. "Only remember, any time you want to confide, I'm always ready. Don't be afraid of me, Rosemary; that is one thing I can not stand. If I thought any of you girls were afraid to come to me and tell me your troubles—"

Rosemary threw her arms around his neck.

"I'm not afraid of you, I'm only ashamed of myself," she whispered. "And I love you more than any one in the world, next to Mother!"

The doctor heard of the shoe incident the next morning, indeed the story was known about

Eastshore within a few hours, and he was able to piece together from what he heard a fair understanding of Nina Edmonds' part in the incident. He succeeded in impressing on Sarah and Shirley, and even Winnie and Aunt Trudy, that they were not to mention Nina's name, or anything they might hear about that unfortunate afternoon, to Rosemary, on pain of his severest displeasure. Nina nodded, rather shamefacedly, to Rosemary in school the next Monday morning and Rosemary spoke pleasantly; but she never voluntarily sought the society of the other girl again and there was something about her that effectually discouraged Nina from attempting any overtures.

A week or two later, Winnie walked into Doctor Hugh's office one night a few minutes before ten o'clock, ostensibly to bring him a glass of milk and a sponge cake before he went to bed.

"Out with it, Winnie," he said good-naturedly. "I can see that you are fairly bristling with the necessity of making an important communication."

"It's Sarah, then," announced Winnie, putting down the glass of milk. "Something has got to be done about her, Hughie."

"Sarah?" inquired the doctor meditatively.

"Why I thought she was conducting herself in an exemplary manner these last few weeks."

Winnie sniffed.

"I'm always the one that has to tell you," she complained. "I'm after asking Miss Trudy these three nights running to speak to you, but does she? She does not. She speaks to Sarah who minds her about as well as the wind does. And Rosemary won't be doing her duty, either; she says 'twould be telling tales and she's got Shirley around to the same way of thinking."

"A conspiracy, eh?" smiled Doctor Hugh.

"Well, Winnie, what should I know that I don't know about my small sister Sarah?"

Winnie was not to be hurried. She dearly loved a chat with her idol, the doctor, and she had the born story-teller's art of prolonging the climax.

"I'm not one to be going out of my way to find something to babble," she declared now. "There's plenty of things goes on I could be running to you with every day in the week, did I so mind; but I believe in letting folks have their own heads, as long as they don't go too far."

The doctor sampled the cake appreciatively.

"Sarah, I take it, has gone too far?" he suggested.

"I don't know as you'd call it that," said Winnie with a faint suspicion of sarcasm. "I may be too finicky and if I am, may I be forgiven for troubling you. But when it comes to sleeping in the same room with six sore-eyed kittens and in the same bed with a mangy street dog, I think something should be done about it. 'Tisn't Christian-like."

"Do you mean to tell me Sarah has got a mess like that up in her room?" demanded Doctor Hugh.

"She has that," said Winnie firmly. "That and worse. She has rabbits in her clothes closet and this morning I had to carry out two dead chickens. She lugs them all up every night to keep 'em warm, she says."

"Is everyone in the house crazy?" asked the bewildered doctor. "What's the matter with you, Winnie? Ordinarily you can make the world take orders from you—couldn't you put a stop to this?"

"I've argued and I've scolded and I've threatened to chloroform every animal on the place," said Winnie impressively, "but Sarah is like cement. Where the Willis will is going to lead her, I'm sure I don't know; but she's too much for me."

"Nonsense!" the doctor pushed back his chair sharply. "At least you could have come to me and told me the first night she tried to keep an animal in her room."

"I'm as weak as the rest of 'em," admitted Winnie. "Miss Trudy cried and Shirley grumbled because she had to go in and sleep with Rosemary; but none of us liked to say a word to you. I don't suppose I'd be after telling you now if I wasn't afraid Sarah would catch something from that dog she brought home to-night."

"I'll go up and read the riot act to her, if it is late," said Doctor Hugh, frowning. "Such a state of affairs is beyond belief. Shirley is sleeping with Rosemary, you say, and Sarah has the menagerie in the bed with her?"

"Well, she has the dog—I saw him under the blanket. But you're not going to bother her to-night, are you?" asked Winnie anxiously.

"Do you suppose I'm going to have her sleeping with a dog that came from Heaven alone knows where?" was the impatient answer. "If I can get the animals out of her room without waking her, well and good; but in any case, out they come."

Sarah woke up the moment the light was

switched on. So did the touseled little yellow dog who thrust his head out from under the covers, close to Sarah's face, and barked sharply at the tall figure standing in the center of the room. The rabbits could be heard scampering about behind the closet door and the kittens set up a hungry mewing from their basket under the bed. A faint scratching came from beneath the inverted waste-basket where a dejected-looking rooster drooped in lonely melancholy.

"Go away!" said Sarah.

"Give me that dog, Sarah," said Doctor Hugh sternly, hoping that he would not laugh. "What do you mean by this kind of performance?"

"He's a nice dog and he hasn't any home, he followed me all the way from the grocery store," said Sarah, her dark eyes regarding her brother suspiciously. "Leave him alone."

For answer the doctor, with a quick movement, lifted the dog clear of the bed clothes.

"You'll hurt him!" cried Sarah in anguish. "You don't know how to be nice to animals. Give him back to me, Hugh."

"Look here, Sarah, this is no time for argument," said Doctor Hugh crisply. "It is out of the question for you to sleep with your barnyard

friends. Everyone of them must go down cellar for the rest of the night and we'll talk about what is to be done with them in the morning."

Sarah wept and protested and even tried to fight for her pets, but Winnie and the doctor were deaf to her pleas. Between them, they carried down every forlorn animal—Sarah's tastes ran to the lame and the halt and the blind, —and then Doctor Hugh opened the window wide (Sarah had insisted on keeping both windows closed lest a draft strike the sick kittens), kissed the back of his small sister's head, for she persistently refused to turn her face toward him, and snapped off the light, leaving Sarah to cry herself to sleep. Rosemary and Shirley, in the next room, had slept peacefully through the racket.

Unfortunately the next morning a call came for the doctor before eight o'clock and snatching a hasty breakfast, he was out of the house before the girls came down. He had no opportunity for the talk with Sarah that day for although he came home to lunch, she was, of course in school, and he did not get home in time for dinner. In fact, it was nearly nine o'clock before his car rolled into the drive.

Aunt Trudy and Rosemary, Winnie told him,

had gone to the movies as a Friday night treat, and Sarah and Shirley had gone to bed promptly at eight o'clock.

"I was setting bread, and didn't see 'em go," Winnie added significantly.

Doctor Hugh went upstairs to the third floor. A light shone under Sarah's door. He knocked, then tried the knob. It was locked.

"Open the door, Sarah," he said quietly.

"Go away!" quavered Sarah, tears in her voice.

Doctor Hugh remembered the communicating door and strode through Rosemary's room. Shirley was fast asleep in her older sister's bed. Sarah had not thought to fasten the door between the rooms and she looked up startled, as her brother came in. She had not undressed, and she sat on the floor, the kittens in her lap. The dog and the rabbits and the rooster were all back in their places.

"This settles it!" said the doctor adamantly. "There's only one way to deal with you, Sarah, and that is to come down like a ton of bricks. You can't keep any pets for two months—that's final."

"Any more pets?" suggested Sarah.

"I said any pets," was the reply. "If you can find homes for these, well and good; if you can't,

I'll try to dispose of them for you. But to-morrow morning, they go away. And now you'll have to help me get them down cellar."

When Sarah finally understood that she was to be deprived of all her pets at once, she wept miserably. No amount of tears or storming or wheedling or pleading, however, could alter Doctor Hugh's decision. Even Winnie suggested that one kitten be kept, but to no avail.

"Sarah must learn she can not do as she pleases and escape the consequences," he said to Rosemary, who came to him on Sarah's behalf. "Half way measures don't go with her, I find, so I've had to be drastic. I'm sorry, too, Rosemary, but I believe I am making the future easier for one strong-willed little girl."

He found homes among his farm patients for all the animals and saw to it that Sarah went with him to carry the pets to their new abodes. She felt much better when she saw that they were to be well cared for, but it was a long time before she would go near the empty rabbit hutch in the side yard. Jack, who discovered that she avoided it, chopped it up at last for kindling wood for Winnie and Sarah was silently grateful. She missed her pets inexpressibly, but the

rest of the household, it must be confessed, enjoyed their absence thoroughly. Sarah and her animals had absorbed the foreground for many hectic weeks.

CHAPTER XXII

A MYSTERY SOLVED

THE brief month of February was starred for the Willis family by the little mother's birthday. She was steadily improving, according to her own letters and the reports from the doctors, and Doctor Hugh, who spent at least one week-end each month with her, brought back glowing accounts of her progress along the road to health. He managed to get away to spend her birthday with her and personally carried her the gifts and notes and loving wishes of the three girls, Aunt Trudy, Winnie and close friends who also remembered.

Almost before the snow had gone, talk of the March fair began to engage the attention of the Eastshore school pupils. This was an annual event and there was much rivalry between the three schools as to which should turn in the most money. The proceeds of the fair went to the Memorial Hospital in Bennington, rather had gone into the building fund until this year for

the hospital had recently been completed. The high and grammar and primary schools, each had tables and exhibits and there was always a large attendance during the Friday afternoon and Saturday the fair was under way.

"The high school is going to have a cafeteria," reported Rosemary at dinner one night. "I wish we'd thought of that. The boys are going to wear white aprons and caps and stand behind the tables and serve the food, while the girls act as waitresses and carry out the dishes and look after the silver. They want every one to eat their supper there Friday and Saturday night."

"All right, we'll come," promised Aunt Trudy. "Hugh can meet us there, can't you, Hugh?"

"Of course," he agreed. "But I'm saving my money for the grammar and primary school tables—I want that understood. I'll treat you all to supper, and please Jack Welles at the same time, but the real expenditures of this family must be where they'll count for the lower grades."

The three girls beamed upon him approvingly.

"I'm going to have charge of the cake table," said Rosemary. "Tell Winnie to buy our Sunday cake from me, won't you, Aunt Trudy? I

have ten different kinds of icings to make—every one of the girls has asked me to ice her cake, because they say I always have good luck."

"I hope you'll use sugar and not salt," murmured the doctor wickedly.

"Oh, Hugh, wasn't that soup too dreadful!" said Rosemary, shuddering at the recollection. "I know perfectly well I didn't put in too much salt and yet no one else seasoned it—I wish I knew how it happened."

"Let it go as a mystery," advised her brother. "What are you going to do in the fair line, Sarah?" he added, turning to her.

"Sell gold fish," she answered placidly. "What are you laughing at?" she asked them in surprise. "I have a great big bowl with gold fish in it and a lot of little bowls; and people buy the little bowls for fifteen cents and I dip out two gold fish with a soup ladle for twenty-five cents, and they take them home."

"I'm going to sell little baby bouquets," announced Shirley, who looked like a "baby bouquet" herself in a pink challis frock. "I have 'em on a tray and I walk around and people buy them for their buttonholes."

"I'll be your first customer, sweetheart," Doctor Hugh assured her.

Preparations for the fair absorbed most of the after-school time of the next two weeks. There were committee meetings and inter-class conferences, and difficulties that required to be straightened out and sensitive feelings that needed careful handling.

"We could get along so much faster, if every one was pleasant," sighed Rosemary to her brother. "Fannie Mears has a dozen pincushions to make and she made twelve of us promise to take one and finish it for the fancy-work table; and then she wouldn't help iron the napkins for the cake plates. She said it wasn't her table and she didn't intend to waste her time. Harriet Reed heard her and she was so mad she ripped up the pincushion she had just sewed and the sewing teacher found it in the wastebasket and she says Harriet has to buy material to replace the stuff she tore and she can't go home after school to-morrow until she has made another pincushion."

"Well, I don't think Harriet helped her cause much," said the doctor pacifically.

"Well Fannie Mears is too mean," said Rosemary. "It isn't a very nice thing to say, Hugh—"

"Then don't say it, dear," he countered

promptly. "Don't gossip, Rosemary. I know of nothing harder on the nerves and temper than a fair, and if you can keep cheerful and serene and not quarrel with your friends and above all, don't talk about them in their absence, you will have done better than most fair workers twice your age."

Rosemary remembered this bit of advice often in the turbulent days that followed. Fannie Mears was one of those girls who manage to sow discord and dissension wherever they go. She had a tireless industry that commended her to her teachers and she was always ready to accept additional tasks and duties. What they did not see was that she distributed these tasks among her friends and the girls in the lower grades and then was unwilling to help them in turn.

"I suppose you've heard what Fannie Mears and Nina Edmonds have done now?" remarked Sarah one noon period when the fair was a scant week off.

"No, what?" asked Rosemary who avoided Nina's name whenever possible.

"Why they've taken three dozen needle-books that have to have the flannel leaves tied in them with ribbon," explained Sarah. "See, Shirley has four to do. Fannie and Nina promised

Miss Carlson they'd do them, and now they've handed them all out in the primary grades, They wanted me to do six, but I wouldn't."

Sarah was engrossed with the gold fish which had already arrived and were housed in the natural history room in the high school building. She visited them several times daily and in his heart Mr. Martin, the biology teacher feared she would kill them with kindness before the fair opened.

"Shirley doesn't mind tying the leaves in, do you dear?" asked Rosemary cheerfully.

"Not much," replied Shirley, "only I wanted to cut the ribbons for my flower bouquets yesterday afternoon, and Fannie wouldn't lend me the scissors."

"I'll help you do it this afternoon," promised Rosemary, who had planned to assemble the recipes for her cake icings and see what supplies were lacking that she would need.

"If that fancy-work table ever gets enough things, the rest of us may be able to pay a little attention to our own tables," she said to herself.

But that afternoon Shirley came crying to Rosemary to say that she had lost the four little needle-books.

"I've looked everywhere," the child insisted.

"All over everywhere, Rosemary. And they're all gone."

"That means I'll have to make four," said poor Rosemary. "Don't cry, Shirley, Sister will see that you have four needle-books to turn in. Though I don't see how you could lose them," she added wearily.

"I'll bet Fannie Mears took those books," declared Sarah when she heard of the loss. "It would be just like her. She thinks it's smart to get four extra books."

Rosemary protested weakly at this idea. In her heart of hearts, she thought Fannie quite capable of such an act, but she had loyally resolved to try and follow Hugh's advice.

"But I can't help wishing he knew Fannie," said Rosemary to herself.

She made the needle-books and helped Shirley measure and cut the ribbon for her bouquets. Sarah's "soup ladle" proved to be a net and that small girl "experimented" with the netting so earnestly that she required a new net to be inserted practically every day. Of course Rosemary was called on for this and as a result her own work was left quite to the last.

"But I couldn't ice the cakes till the day before the fair, anyway," she said philosophically

to Miss Parsons, "though I did want to have time to see that the plates and napkins were matched; last year we ran short of napkins."

The morning of the fair, Rosemary hurried upstairs to ice her cakes. They were all arranged on the kitchen table, thirty of them, each one a triumph of culinary art. Rosemary was excused from school for the day, but the cakes had been baked late the previous afternoon for it was a school rule that the fair was not to interfere with class attendance.

"And I don't see why Rosemary Willis should be excused," muttered Fannie Mears indignantly.

"I suppose you think she can ice thirty cakes in half an hour," Sarah flung back. "And set the table and go home and get dressed, too."

Humming happily, Rosemary tied on her white apron and went about her mixing. As she had said, there were ten different icings to be made, the same flavor being allowed only three cakes. Some were loaves and some were layers and one or two had been scorched. These Rosemary carefully grated and planned to ice thickly.

In the midst of her work she made a distressing discovery. The linen cloth for the table was soiled!

"I'm just as sure as I can be that it was clean in the drawer last night," Rosemary confided to Miss Parsons. "I looked the last thing."

She had found it rolled up in a wad and stuffed at the furtherest end of the table drawer. Not only was it rumpled, but it showed several stains.

"I'll go home this noon and get one of ours," said Rosemary. "I think I'll be glad when this fair is over."

"I think we'll all be glad," replied Miss Parsons, frowning a little, for the cloth incident annoyed her. She, too, had been certain it was clean the afternoon before.

Rosemary went home at noon, leaving half the cakes to do on her return. A large bowl of chocolate icing stood on the table, covered with a muslin cloth.

There was no one to see the kitchen door open slyly fifteen minutes later, no one to see a figure dart in and make for the table. One hand lifted the muslin cloth, the other reached for the large tin salt shaker.

"Drop that!" said a voice peremptorily.

The shaker dropped to the floor with a clatter, and Fannie Mears turned to face Mr. Oliver.

"What are you doing in here?" he asked

sternly. "Did Miss Parsons ask you to do anything to that bowl?"

At that moment Miss Parsons herself came into the kitchen.

"I was looking for you," Mr. Oliver explained, "and I saw Fannie Mears about to shake something into that large bowl on the table. I thought Rosemary Willis was working here this morning."

"She was—" Miss Parsons stooped to recover the shaker. "Salt!" she ejaculated as she saw what it was. "Fannie Mears, I do believe you were going to salt Rosemary's icing!"

Fannie began to cry.

"Did you salt the soup last fall?" asked the teacher sternly. "Did you? Answer me, Fannie."

"Yes, I did," sobbed Fannie. "I got so sick and tired of hearing about Rosemary and her cooking. I put in the salt while she was looking at the tables in the dining-room with you. It makes me sick to hear all the fuss people make about her being such a good cook."

Rosemary, breathless from running, burst in at that juncture, the clean tablecloth under her arm.

"Rosemary," said Mr. Oliver gravely, "Fannie

has just told us that it was she who over-salted the soup at the Institute dinner—you remember?"

"You did?" cried Rosemary, turning to the other girl. "Did you take the needle-books you gave Shirley, too?"

Fannie nodded.

"Did you wad up the clean tablecloth for the cake table?" chorused Rosemary and Miss Parsons together. "And spill tomato soup on it, too?"

"Catsup," corrected Fannie.

"How can you be so horrid!" cried Rosemary in a burst of frankness.

"Well, it's your own fault," declared Fannie resentfully. "You've got a swelled head over your cooking and I just wanted to make you see you weren't so much, after all."

"But there were teachers from all over the State at the Institute dinner," protested Rosemary. "If the dinner was spoiled, they would blame the school because we were not better taught. And the fair is for the hospital and if it doesn't go off right, the whole school loses credit. Don't you see, Fannie, you weren't just hurting me, but you were making the whole school fall down."

"You come down to the office with me, Fannie," said Mr. Oliver sternly. "I think you and I will have a little talk and perhaps you will see things in a clearer light afterward. Certainly your ideas need to be set right, if you are to continue in school."

"Oh, dear, I hope he won't scold her," sighed Rosemary, beginning to stir the chocolate mixture. "As long as she didn't get the salt into this, I don't care, and I don't think Mr. Oliver should."

"He may think differently," said Miss Parsons briefly.

CHAPTER XXV

GARDEN DAYS

MR. Oliver did think differently. He talked very seriously to Fannie for nearly an hour and then Rosemary was sent for to come to the office.

"Rosemary," said the principal, when she appeared, "I know you have a great many last things to do for the fair, but I had to speak to you before the three o'clock dismissal bell. Fannie is ready to apologize to you before your class is dismissed this afternoon."

He had explained to Fannie that she must either publicly apologize to Rosemary or be indefinitely suspended.

"I quite understand," went on Mr. Oliver, "that a belated apology like this can not make up to you for the humiliation you suffered on the night of the dinner, but at least the cooking class will know that you were not at fault. I'm afraid you've had to endure a good deal of teasing on the score of the salty soup."

"Oh, I didn't mind, really I didn't!" cried Rosemary quickly. "I'd rather Fannie didn't say anything, Mr. Oliver. Honestly I would."

"I think it will be good for her," said the principal whimsically. "Any girl who can be guilty of a series of such mean little acts as Fannie has confessed to, can not help but benefit by open confession."

"But Mr. Oliver!" Rosemary spoke involuntarily and the color deepened in her face.

"Yes?" he encouraged.

"Nothing—only, if you make Fannie apologize, you are punishing me," brought out Rosemary desperately. "I can't stand it to sit there in class and listen to her. I don't care about the salty soup—at least I don't now; but I know how I should feel to have to get up before the whole class. Please don't make Fannie do it."

The principal tapped his desk thoughtfully with his pencil.

"All right," he said presently. "I certainly have no right to make you uncomfortable, Rosemary, and even less desire. Apologize here and now, Fannie, and I'll excuse you from a class acknowledgment. But only on Rosemary's account, mind you. I think you deserve all the punishment I can give you."

Fannie made a faltering and shame-faced apology and then Rosemary was allowed to go back to the kitchen and, as the three o'clock bell sounded, Fannie to go home. She did not come to the fair and her class mates did not see her again till next Monday.

True to his promise, Doctor Hugh took his family to the high school cafeteria for supper and Jack Welles, who was one of the carvers, served them in fine style. Frank Fenton was manager and he insisted on securing the most desirable table for them, much to Doctor Hugh's amusement and Sarah's ill-concealed disgust.

"Why do you smile and say 'How do you do' to him, Rosemary?" she demanded of her sister hotly. "I think it's untruthful to pretend to like people you don't."

"Well it isn't!" flung back Rosemary, who was tired from standing behind the cake table that afternoon. "It's impolite to stick out your tongue at them the way you do!"

"Let me catch you doing that!" Doctor Hugh warned Sarah. "However, children, let's not have any quarrels on a fair night. How late are they going to keep this up, Rosemary?"

"Only till eight o'clock, Rosemary answered. "We have to go back, now, Hugh, and serve at

the tables. Are you and Aunt Trudy coming up?"

"Right away," he assured her. "And we'll bring our pocketbooks."

The fair was an unquestionable success. Shirley's bouquets sold swiftly and her tray was replenished again and again that evening and during the next Saturday afternoon. Sarah convulsed her customers by her business-like manner and she did a thriving trade in gold fish.

Winnie came Saturday afternoon and bought a large cake and another for Mrs. Welles who was kept home by a bad cold. The coveted state of bare tables was attained an hour before the fair was scheduled to close Saturday afternoon. and the Eastshore pupils had the pleasant knowledge that they would have more money to turn over to the hospital than in any previous year.

Spring came to Eastshore with fascinating suddenness. One night it was blustery and cold and householders stoked their furnaces with a sigh for the nearly empty coal bins, and the following morning a South wind blew gently, robins chirped on the lawns that showed a faint green tinge and children appeared in school with huge bundles of pussy willows.

"What do you say to fixing up the garden, Rosemary?" Doctor Hugh suggested, tumbling a sheaf of seed catalogues on the living-room table early in April. "If Mother comes home in June, she'd like to find plenty of flowers growing, wouldn't she?"

"Oh, yes!" Rosemary's response was enthusiastic. "Do let's plan a garden, Hugh, and if it doesn't cost too much, we could have Peter Cooper fix up the lawn. It's rather thin in spots."

The gardening fever seized upon the Willis family and the girls sped home from school to dig and plant and rake and hoe. They recklessly promised Winnie a vegetable garden back of the garage and risked a late frost to jab onion and radish and lettuce seeds into the patch, Peter Cooper, the handy man, spaded up for them. Rosemary acquired a line of golden freckles across her nose and Sarah "got a shade darker every day," according to Winnie.

"I don't care!" the object of her solicitation retorted. "I won't wear a hat—they're hot and stuffy and make my head ache."

"But your mother won't know you," urged Aunt Trudy, who was sewing on the porch in

the warm sunshine. "She'll take you for an Indian."

"Oh, I guess my mother'll know me," said Sarah, but all her determination could not keep out a note of doubt in her voice.

The next morning she was late for breakfast. Rosemary called her twice and Winnie went up to see what was the matter.

"She says she's all dressed and she's coming right away," she reported, but no Sarah appeared.

Doctor Hugh went to the foot of the stairs.

"Sarah!" he called in a tone that seldom failed to produce results.

"I'm coming," answered Sarah, and they heard her feet beginning the descent of the stairs.

She came into the dining-room so quietly, that Aunt Trudy glanced at her in surprise.

"Why Sarah!" she gasped, "What in the world have you done to your face?"

"What's the matter with it?" demanded Sarah hardily.

"It looks skinned," said Shirley critically. "You can't go to school looking like that, can she Hugh?"

Rosemary seemed to understand.

"So that's what you were doing last night!" she said. "I wondered what you were fussing around so for; your light was burning long after I went to bed."

"You've skinned your face, child," insisted Aunt Trudy. "I never saw a worse looking complexion, never. What have you done to yourself?"

Winnie, bringing in the later-comer's oatmeal, took one hasty glance.

"My land, Sarah, have you been walking in your sleep?" she asked in alarm. "You look as though you'd fallen out of a window and landed on your face."

Sarah's eyes filled with tears and two splashed down into her lap. She looked at Doctor Hugh, who nodded to her encouragingly. He had not said a word since her entrance.

"Never mind what they say, Sarah," he told her cheerily, "just tell your old brother about it; looks are not the most important thing in this world, are they?"

"Aunt Trudy said my mother wouldn't know me," explained Sarah, winking back the tears for her poor sore face smarted at the touch of salt. "And I bleached all the brown off, Hugh; only it is so sore."

"My dear child!" he said in amazement. Then added, "What did you put on your face, dear?"

"Well, you see, I wanted it to be real white," said Sarah, sure that he would understand, "so I used a cucumber and buttermilk and a lemon and I scrubbed it afterward with pumice stone."

They stared at her a moment in silence.

"It's a wonder you have any face left," declared Winnie. "I missed the buttermilk from the refrigerator."

Doctor Hugh said little then, but he took Sarah into the office and put something healing on the red little face. Then he explained that Aunt Trudy had only been teasing her, and that tan was pleasing to most people because it showed that the owner of the face liked to be outdoors. He allowed Sarah to go with him on his rounds that morning and so saved her the ordeal of going to school to meet the inevitable questions about her face. And, after the girls were in bed that night, he "spoke his mind" as Winnie said, to her and Aunt Trudy.

"I'd rather have her tanned as black as a piece of leather," he concluded, "than to be fussing with 'creams' and bleaching lotions. For goodness sake, don't bother her about her looks for at least ten years. She'll begin soon enough."

So Sarah gardened to her heart's content without a hat, and in time the seeds planted made a creditable showing. The doctor spent several evenings figuring and at last decided they might afford to have the house painted. He chose a deep cream color, after many family consultations, combined with a soft brown and when it was finished every one was pleased and sure that the little mother, for whom it was really done, would be equally delighted.

It did seem a waste of sunshine to be obliged to be cooped up in school during such enchanting weather, but it was impossible to convince the trustees of this. The three Willis girls had to be content with spending every hour out of school in the open air. Jack Welles was also gardening and though he gloomily spoke of the weeding to come, he taught the girls many things about planting and showed them how to care for the shrubbery that Doctor Hugh had sent out from the nearest nursery and had small time to care for himself.

"Mother does love roses so," said Rosemary once, "and Hugh is determined to surprise her with a lot of new bushes."

"Is that why you're named Rosemary?" asked

Jack curiously, thinking it strange that he had never noticed before how pretty freckles were.

Rosemary's expressive face sobered.

"Partly," she answered, "but I had a sister, you know, whom I never saw. She was named Mary, for Mother. And she died when she was three years old. So when I was born, a year later, Mother named me 'Rosemary,' which means remembrance. Mother told me once that I was named in memory of the little dead sister, and for the flowers she loved and to please my father who thought 'Mary' the most beautiful name in the world. So I've always liked my name."

"It suits you, somehow," said Jack. "Want to hold this bush steady while I fill in round the roots?"

Whenever Jack was touched, he sought employment for his hands, for fear he might say something to show his feeling. He had all the boy's horror of "making a fool" of himself.

April, with its soft, sudden showers and its exquisite velvety greens ran into May with its first hot days and the sound of Peter Cooper's hammer loud in the land as he diligently worked putting up screens and awnings. Aunt Trudy

began to "feel the heat" and Winnie and Sarah battled again over the ethics of killing defenseless flies.

Toward the end of the month, the Student's Council, conceived the plan of holding a picnic for the three schools, an all-day picnic some Saturday. The plan was proposed at a morning assembly and met with such vigorous and hearty response that the date was settled upon then and there. Winnie was beseiged that night by three excited girls who asked her advice on what "would do" to take to the picnic.

"We want to take enough, because some of them will bring only a little," said Rosemary. "The boys always stuff an apple in their pockets and then wonder why they are hungry when noon comes."

"I'll pack you three lunches that will be lunches," promised Winnie, "and there'll be enough to give away, too."

"We're going in motor trucks," bubbled Shirley, "I want to ride up front."

"I want to ride on back," proclaimed Sarah who never, by any chance, seemed to agree with anyone else. "I want to ride with my feet hanging over. And I'm going to tie a string to Shirley's rag doll and drag it in the dust—like the

pictures in the Early Martyrs book, you know."

Shirley began to hop and down with anger and began to cry.

"I won't have my dolly dragged in the dust," she shrieked.

"Martyrs have to be dragged in the dust," the perverse Sarah insisted. "I want to see her bounce when she hits the stones."

"Oh, Sarah, do be still," begged Rosemary. Then, to the weeping Shirley, "Sarah is only teasing you, darling. She wouldn't hurt your dolly."

"Are the teachers going?" asked Aunt Trudy anxiously. "I hope some older people will be on hand to look after you."

"Oh, the teachers are going—worse luck!" Sarah assured her. "I'll bet they shriek every time I find a water snake."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE SCHOOL PICNIC

THE Saturday chosen for the picnic dawned clear and warm and there was no sleep for anyone in the Willis family after six o'clock. Shirley and Sarah had to be forcibly restrained from investigating the boxes on the kitchen table and Winnie finally decided to finish packing them before breakfast, in order to "get a moment's peace" as she said.

Sarah flatly refused to go to the picnic unless her red tie could be found, not that she wanted to wear it for decorative purposes, she carefully explained, but because she thought she could catch minnows in it. There was a brook running through the picnic field and Sarah meant to explore it thoroughly.

By the time Rosemary had found the tie, Shirley had managed to upset the shoe blacking on her white shoes and had to be hastily refitted with tan socks and oxfords. Rosemary, flying down the hall with a new pair of shoelaces for

her sister, brushed past Doctor Hugh on his way to the breakfast table.

"Is there a fire, or is it only the picnic?" he asked humorously, and she assured him that it was "always like this" on picnic mornings.

"Well I don't envy the job of the chaperones," said the doctor feelingly, when they were at last seated and Aunt Trudy was pouring his coffee. "You and Shirley," he said to Sarah, "want to do as Rosemary says to-day."

"Then I hope she doesn't say much," retorted Sarah ungraciously.

"If I thought you meant to be as rude as you sometimes sound, Sarah, I'd read you a lecture on politeness," said her brother, rather sternly. "But we won't spoil a holiday by bickering. Can you all go together in the same motor truck?"

"Mr. Oliver said we could do as we pleased, as long as none of the trucks were overcrowded," explained Rosemary. "I'm going to try and have Sarah and Shirley in the same car with me; you see if three other girls want to go together, that will just even it up."

"All right, children, have a good time and don't eat too many sandwiches," said the doctor cheerfully. "I'm sorry I can't stay to see you off, but I'll hear all about the fun to-night. Try

not to go crazy, Auntie, before these Indians are safely out of the house."

As soon as he had gone, the girls began to "pack up" though the motor trucks were not to leave the school grounds till half-past nine. They were all dressed in white and each carried a sweater, Sarah's red, Rosemary's blue and Shirley's apple green. Winnie had made up a generous box of lunch for each, and three vacuum bottles, a surprise from Doctor Hugh, were waiting them, filled with lemonade.

"I think we'd better go early, Winnie," said Rosemary, "on account of getting in the same truck. The earlier we are, the better chance we have of getting seats together."

"Yes, it's always well to go early to any picnic," replied Winnie wisely. "The fun can't begin till you start, so why delay?"

The motor trucks were drawn up before the school when the girls reached the grounds and a group of boys and girls were standing about them. They made a parade showing, being six in number and gaily decorated with flags and bunting. There were two teachers assigned to each truck and Rosemary was delighted to find that Miss Parsons and her class teacher, Miss

Penfield, were to be in charge of one of the grammar school trucks.

"Why I don't see any reason why you and your sisters shouldn't be together," Miss Penfield answered when Rosemary asked her about Sarah and Shirley. "Hop in here, and you'll be placed and may not have to move."

But just before the trucks were ready to start, Nina Edmonds and Fannie Mears hurried up. They tried to climb into the truck where Rosemary sat.

"Got my load now," said the driver promptly, but pleasantly. "You'll have to go in the next car."

"That's full of primary kids—we don't belong in there with them," protested Fannie. "Oh, look, there are Sarah and Shirley Willis—they can't go in this car, they belong in the primary grades."

"Now Fannie, don't be disagreeable," begged Miss Penfield. "Rosemary wants her younger sisters with her which is perfectly natural. It won't hurt you to ride in one of the other trucks. Do it to be obliging, if for no other reason."

"I'm sure Fannie doesn't want to be disobliging, Miss Penfield," said Nina smoothly, "but

Mr. Oliver distinctly said there were two trucks for the grammar grades and that we should not go out of our assigned cars. Besides, Fannie and I want to sit with our friends and they're all in this car. Rosemary needn't move, but I think Sarah and Shirley should go where they belong."

Miss Penfield flushed with vexation and annoyance. Mr. Oliver had made just that ruling and she knew that Nina was quoting the letter of his order, while ignoring the spirit. If she chose to make a scene she could probably send the two girls to the other car, but it was a question whether in attempting to enforce her commands she might not at the same time spoil the day for Rosemary.

"Are you crowded, Miss Penfield?" called Jack Welles, standing up in the first truck and looking back. "We have room for three up here; send them along, if you need space."

"You go, Rosemary, and take Sarah and Shirley," said Miss Penfield quickly. "Now come in here, Nina and Fannie, and for pity's sake let us have no more of this jangling."

The high school cars held the coveted lead in the line and Jack happened to be in the first one. Rosemary and Sarah and Shirley were welcomed joyously by the older boys and girls

and Nina and Fannie furiously regretted their insistence. They would have liked to go in the high school truck and if they had only waited, or had been less determined in their demands, they might have found places there.

When the large field, where the Eastshore picnics were always held, was reached, the trucks were parked in a circle and the pupils scattered to amuse themselves according to their varying ages and ideas. Shirley joined the little girls and shrieking games of "Tag" were immediately under way. Sarah, ignoring the suggestions of her classmates that they hunt for wildflowers, dropped flat on her stomach and began a search for bugs. Rosemary left the lunch boxes under the eyes of the teachers who gathered in a ring and took out knitting and fancy work, and went off with half a dozen girls her age to gather and wash wild-grape vine leaves to serve as plates at the luncheon.

As it is at all picnics, no one could really think of anything long, till the boxes were unpacked and the good things set out. The boys helped by getting in everyone's way, by tipping over the bottles of milk and dropping ants and spiders on the tablecloths to frighten the girls. There were great slabs of moss-covered rock all

about the field and these, when covered with cloths, made the nicest kind of tables. The groups gathered to suit themselves and when Rosemary found that Jack Welles, Jerry and Fred Gordon, Ben Kelsey, Norman Cox and Eustice Gray were gravitating toward the rock she had selected and that Shirley and Sarah were each bringing a playmate to eat with them, she was thankful that Winnie had had the packing of the boxes.

There were more than enough sandwiches and stuffed eggs and cup cakes and strawberry tarts to satisfy every one and the boys forgot to be shy and, to Rosemary's delight, helped themselves without urging, quite as though they knew Winnie had had their pleasure in mind, as indeed the good soul had.

"We're going to play ball this afternoon," said Jack, when it was a mortal impossibility for any one to eat more. "Mr. Hamlin gave orders that we must go far enough away so that there would be no danger of striking any of the kids with the ball. We're going up the brook away to an open pasture. Can we help you with the dishes or anything?" he added thoughtfully.

"There won't be any dishes," smiled Rose-

mary. "Winnie put in only paper plates and napkins, and it won't be wasteful to leave the little that's left for the birds. If you want to bury the boxes, that will be nice; Hugh always detests any litter left around after a picnic."

"We'll dig a hole and bury all the trash," said Eustice Gray instantly. "Come on, fellows, we'll go collect it."

"But you haven't any shovel," said the practical Sarah.

"A-ha, you're a good detective, but you don't know motor trucks," replied Eustice, grinning at her, for he had taken a fancy to the odd child who had screamed to him not to mash the spider he had fished out of his lemonade cup. "All good motor trucks take a spade with them, under the seat, to use in case they are stuck on some muddy road."

"Oh!" said Sarah. "Then I'll come help you."

And she trotted around after the boys till they had collected the litter and trash left by each group of picnickers and buried it neatly in a hole they filled in and stamped down firmly. She would have gone with them to play ball, but Rosemary held her back.

"Well, if I can't play ball, I'll go hunt snakes,"

decided Sarah whose frock was torn and dirty already, but whose streaked face was radiant with the good time she was having.

All the boys, big and little, had disappeared immediately after luncheon, to play ball in more distant fields. The farmers of the neighborhood were perfectly willing to lend their pasture land for a day and there were no crops to be spoiled by tramping feet for several miles along the brook.

The younger girls gathered around one of the primary teachers who promised to tell them stories and most of the grammar and high school girls had brought their crocheting and were ready to sit quietly a while and exchange patterns. Rosemary, however, did not feel in what she called a "knitting mood" and when Bessie Kent suggested that they go wading in the brook, she jumped at the idea. A dozen girls were found to be aching for a frolic and Miss Penfield smilingly told them to be young while they could, but not to wade too far and not to stay too long.

The water was icy cold, and much laughter and shrieking advertised the first step, but as soon as they were used to the temperature only the exhilaration remained. Led by Rosemary, they started slowly up stream.

"Good gracious, if Nina Edmonds and Fannie Mears aren't coming, too," whispered Bessie, glancing back over her shoulder. "Wonder why they want to tag along?"

If she had only known it, Nina and Fannie were feeling decidedly left out of things. They longed to go with the high school girls who persistently ignored them and they were not at all popular with their own classmates. When they found that they were to be left on the edge of the circle of crocheters, they determined to follow the wading party. Nina privately thought she was far too old to indulge in such a silly pastime, and Fannie hated walking anyway, but at the moment wading was better than doing nothing.

"Who's that shouting?" asked Rosemary, as they rounded a bend in the brook and heard a distant noise.

"Must be the boys," replied Bessie. "Yes, see, there they are—way over there; they're playing ball on the other side of the brook, a couple of fields further on."

The girls could see the running figures plainly, and from time to time a bellow of pure joy and excitement wafted down to them.

"Don't they have fun—" Rosemary was beginning, when a scream startled them all.

"I've cut my foot!" shrieked Fannie Mears. "Oh, the whole bottom of the brook must be covered with broken glass. Look how it bleeds!"

She lifted her foot from the water and Nina, who caught a glimpse of the widening gash, cried out in horror. Fannie let her foot fall and struck the glass again. She screamed even more loudly and began to beat the water with her hands.

"Look out, you won't be able to see the glass!" cried Rosemary, turning and dashing toward her. "Stand still, Fannie, just a minute."

Rosemary stooped and felt carefully down about Fannie's feet. Her hands struck a broken bottle and she lifted it out and tossed it on the bank.

"That's what did it," she said calmly. "Hurry and let me see your foot—wait I'll pull you up on the bank, Fannie."

But when Fannie saw her cut foot, which was bleeding profusely, and the girls, who had crowded around saw it and her white, frightened face, a veritable panic started. Fannie slipped into the brook, crying with pain and fright, apparently believing that if her foot was under water and out of sight it must stop bleeding, and the other girls began a chorus of shrill

screaming that tried Rosemary to the point of exasperation.

"How can you be so silly!" she stormed. "Somebody hold Fannie's foot while I tie it up; I know first-aid. She's losing blood all the time. Somebody help me— Oh, don't stand there like that! Bessie, can't you hold her foot just a minute?"

"I couldn't!" Bessie shivered and drew back. "My knees are wabbling now, Rosemary. Blood always makes me so sick!"

"Then run," said Rosemary desperately, seeing that she could expect no help from the frightened girls about her. "Run, and tell some of the boys to come quick!"

CHAPTER XXVII

A LONG YEAR'S END

AS Bessie obediently started in the direction of the ball-players, Nina Edmonds uttered a shocked exclamation.

"Oh, Rosemary, I don't think you should have done that," she said reprovingly. "We haven't our shoes and stockings on, you know."

"I suppose we should let Fannie bleed to death, then?" suggested Rosemary, her great eyes snapping fire. "Fannie won't hold still herself and not one of you has the nerve to hold her steady and yet you stand there and make a fuss because a boy may see you without your shoes and stockings on. If you're going to be ashamed of anything, Nina Edmonds, be ashamed of being a coward!"

Nina flushed angrily, but Rosemary was trying to pull Fannie back on the bank and paid no further attention to her. Fannie fought off any attempt to touch her and she cried and groaned without a moment's pause. Rosemary, straight-

ening up after a hard and ineffectual tussle, was relieved to see Bessie running toward them, followed by a string of boys, Jack Welles in advance. Bessie's cries had reached them long before she came to the field and they had correctly interpreted her frantic appeals for help.

"Oh, Jack, I'm so glad you've come!" cried Rosemary. "Help me get Fannie out on the bank. She's cut her foot badly and she won't let me touch her, to tie it up."

Will Mears, Fannie's brother, panted up and when he saw his sister and understood that she was hurt, he bent down and lifted her out with one swift, strong pull.

"Gee, you *have* cut yourself!" he said in distress as he saw the injured foot.

"Hush up!" said Jack sternly, as the girls began to shriek again. "Go away, if you're afraid to look. Rosemary knows what to do, don't you, Rosemary? Tell us how to help you."

"Hold her still," directed Rosemary, frantically calling on her memory for Doctor Hugh's first-aid lessons. "I'll have to wash it out the best way I can, but I think I can stop the bleeding. Then we'll have to get her to a doctor."

"I'll hold her," said Will Mears grimly. "You go ahead."

Fannie could not twist and squirm in his strong arms, and Rosemary deftly washed out the great jagged cut that had slashed across the slim instep, and then, further scandalizing Nina, tore a wide bandage from the bottom of her petticoat, brought the edges of the cut closely together and bound it tightly.

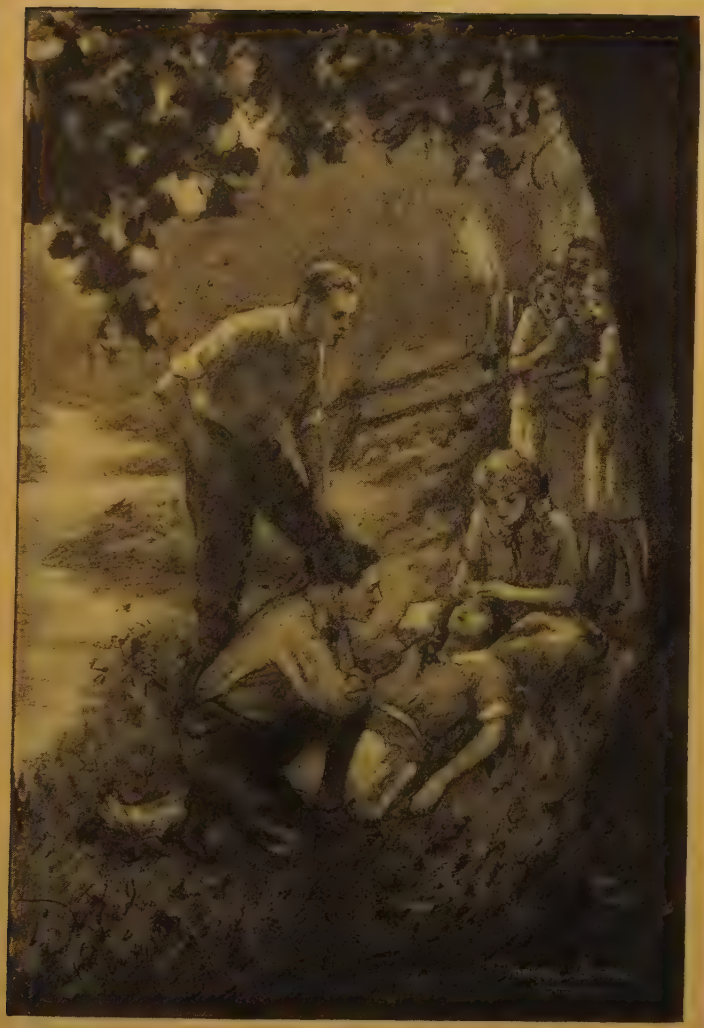
"I think you ought to carry her to the truck," she said, when she had finished. "Look out, Will, she's fainted. Lay her on the grass."

The sight of Fannie, white and motionless, frightened the girls, and it must be confessed the boys, too, far more than her steady screaming. Rosemary did not appear to be alarmed, but borrowing Jack's handkerchief, dipped it in the water and gently bathed Fannie's forehead. Then she took her head in her lap and waited a few minutes. Presently Fannie opened her eyes.

"She's better now," said Rosemary.

"I'll carry her to the truck," declared Will Mears, looking with respect on the young nurse. "As you say, I think we'd better get her to a doctor. Some of you run on ahead and explain what has happened and tell them we want to start back right away."

The girls sped on ahead and in a few minutes



PRESENTLY FANNY OPENED HER EYES.

the picnic had broken up hastily. A sort of bed was made in one of the trucks, using the sweaters and wraps of the other girls, and Fannie was laid on this, with her head in Rosemary's lap. Will Mears had no confidence in any one else's ability to take care of his sister.

"She would have bled to death, if it hadn't been for Rosemary," he said to Jack, as the truck started, the driver carefully avoiding the bad places in the road in order to spare the patient any unnecessary jar. "I never saw a girl before who could do up cuts and not scream at the sight of blood. I suppose it's because her brother is a doctor."

"Not altogether," replied Jack curtly. "Rosemary doesn't happen to be the screaming kind of girl."

Will Mears directed that the truck be driven to Doctor Hugh's office where, by good fortune, they found him just in from a call, and Fannie, quiet and spent now, with no breath left for screaming, had her wound washed with an antiseptic and dressed. Then she was taken home and put to bed. She was weak from the loss of blood and the consequences might have been serious, the doctor admitted, if the cut had not been tied in time. But to Will Mears' glowing praise

of Rosemary, he replied that she had only used her knowledge of first-aid treatment.

"Then all girls ought to learn it," burst out the high school junior. "Those other girls stood around like perfect dubs. Fannie could have bled to death, for all they did."

"All girls ought to know first-aid," affirmed the doctor. "My sisters are not going to be left helpless when an accident happens."

"But you can't say it's altogether the first aid," persisted Will Mears. "Look at Nina Edmonds; she might learn the whole programme, and then, when something did happen, she'd run around like a chicken with its head off! First-aid doesn't teach you to keep your wits about you and not to scream and act like a lunatic generally, Doctor Willis."

"Well, of course, one needs character as well as first-aid knowledge," admitted Doctor Hugh, smiling a little, "but if one knows what to do, there's no temptation to wring the hands and scream, Will. Rosemary knew what to do, therefore she did it."

But Will Mears refused to give all the credit to first-aid and indeed all the boys and girls who had seen Rosemary care for Fannie, were loud in their praise of her fearlessness and skill.

Mrs. Mears sent for her to come and see Fannie, as soon as the patient grew stronger, and though Rosemary rather dreaded the visit, she came away feeling that next term in school she and Fannie would be, if not close friends, at least on amiable terms instead of irritatingly hostile which had been their covert attitude this last year.

For it was time to think of school as "next year," since this term was so nearly over. The Eastshore schools closed the middle of June and the week after the picnic the pupils were plunged into the throes of the final examinations. Even Shirley went about anxiously wondering if she would "pass" and asking each of her sisters if they thought she had had good marks during the year.

"I just have to be promoted," she would say over and over. "I just have to be promoted, 'cause my mother is coming home."

"When's Mother coming home?" was Sarah's cry. "You said in a year, Hugh, and it's a year this month."

"I think we may look for her home sometime this month," said the doctor one day when Sarah had asked him for the twentieth time. "You mustn't expect her to keep a calendar, Sarah and

come back on the exact day she went away. It may be a few days longer, dear."

"She went away a year ago this Wednesday," said Rosemary, half to herself.

"Has it been a long year, Rosemary?" asked her brother, quickly.

"In spots," answered Rosemary, the tears rushing to her eyes. "It has been ever so long, sometimes, Hugh."

"Well, let's all get promoted," suggested Shirley, in her little chirpy voice. "Mother would like us all promoted, wouldn't she, Hugh?"

"She'll about eat you up, promoted or not," he answered, swinging Shirley to the top of his desk the better to hug her. "But by all means be promoted; that will be fine news to tell her."

The dreaded examinations approached relentlessly, engulfed each fearful class and released them, after a few days, to wait their fates. Shirley was sure she had "passed in everything," Sarah was superbly indifferent, and Rosemary had secret qualms about history. Jack Welles confided that he didn't care so much whether or not he passed, but the uncertainty was driving him mad.

"If I pass, I get my choice of three dandy fishing rods," he explained to Rosemary. "And if

I flunk, I have to work in the garden all summer without a single fishing trip."

This state of suspense extended to the last day of the term. The senior classes, in the high and grammar schools, were given their ratings earlier, to allow them to prepare for the graduating exercises. Rosemary, Sarah, Shirley and Aunt Trudy went to the exercises and all through the hot June night Rosemary sat, wide-eyed and delighted, wondering if the day would ever come when she could sit on the platform in a white frock with her arms filled with roses, and perhaps be called on to read an essay.

The day after the graduation, the cards were handed out among the other grades. Jack Welles waited to walk home with the Willis girls and though his patience was sorely tried by the prolonged farewells, he managed to keep fairly good-humored.

"Why was Bessie Kent kissing you as though she never expected to see you again?" he asked Rosemary curiously. "Doesn't she live near you and won't you see her nearly every day this summer?"

"Oh, that's just because it was the last day of school," explained Rosemary.

"Silly, I call it," declared Sarah, voicing Jack's

sentiments. "I got promoted, Jack. And I'm going to hunt specimens all summer for the biology teacher. He asked me to."

"I got promoted, too," cried Shirley proudly. "I got a silver star on my card. And now I'm in the second grade."

Jack looked at Rosemary. She nodded happily.

"Passed in everything," she said. "Even history. Won't it be fun to be in the grammar graduating class next term!"

"Well I passed, myself," announced Jack. "Watch me pick out that fishing rod. And the garden won't see much of me this summer, I can tell you that."

"Mother will be so pleased," said Rosemary, as Jack went on to his house, and the three girls mounted the steps of the Willis home. "She likes us to do well in school, and Hugh was never kept back a single year. She would like us to follow his record, I know."

"The house looks kind of nice, doesn't it?" said Sarah unexpectedly. Comment of that kind was unusual with her.

The house did look "nice," its rich cream color showing up the vivid green of the shrubbery and the velvety surface of the well-kept lawn. The

new rose bushes were bearing well and Doctor Hugh had managed new green and white striped awnings for the porch.

"I wish Mother could see the roses," said Rosemary as they went in.

The late afternoon June sunshine streamed in through the hall window and made a broad band to the stairway which was in shadow. Voices sounded in the living room.

"Hugh's home!" cried Sarah, her quick eyes darting to the hall table where a man's hat and a light leather bag lay together with a woman's hat and veil.

Rosemary saw the hat and veil. They were not Aunt Trudy's. Her heart gave a sudden leap.

They went forward across the hall to the doorway of the living-room. There, in the large armchair, facing the door, sat a little woman with eyes like Rosemary's and dark hair like Sarah, but faintly streaked with gray across its ripples. She was thin, as though from a recent illness, but a clear pink glowed in her cheeks and her soft voice was firm and strong. Her lovely mouth smiled at the girls and she held out her arms. Doctor Hugh, standing behind her chair, laughed a little, to keep from crying he afterward said,

as Sarah and Shirley hurled themselves upon their mother, both shrieking, while they waved their report cards, "We're promoted! We're promoted! We passed in every single thing!"

She took them both in her lap at once and their arms were about her neck. Across the yellow and dark head, her eyes met those of her oldest daughter. Doctor Hugh, too, looked at Rosemary.

She had not moved from the doorway since Sarah and Shirley had brushed past her in their mad rush. Standing motionless and speechless, a slender hand on either side of the doorframe, she watched her sisters claim the mother's first kiss. Then, as the beautiful eyes were raised to hers, she made an effort to speak. All the love and longing and loneliness of the past year, not fully felt till now, rushed to her voice. She took a step forward.

"Mother!" said Rosemary.

THE END

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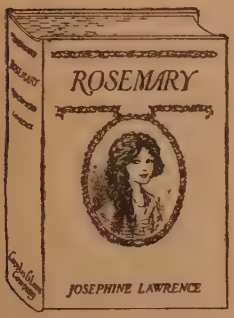

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